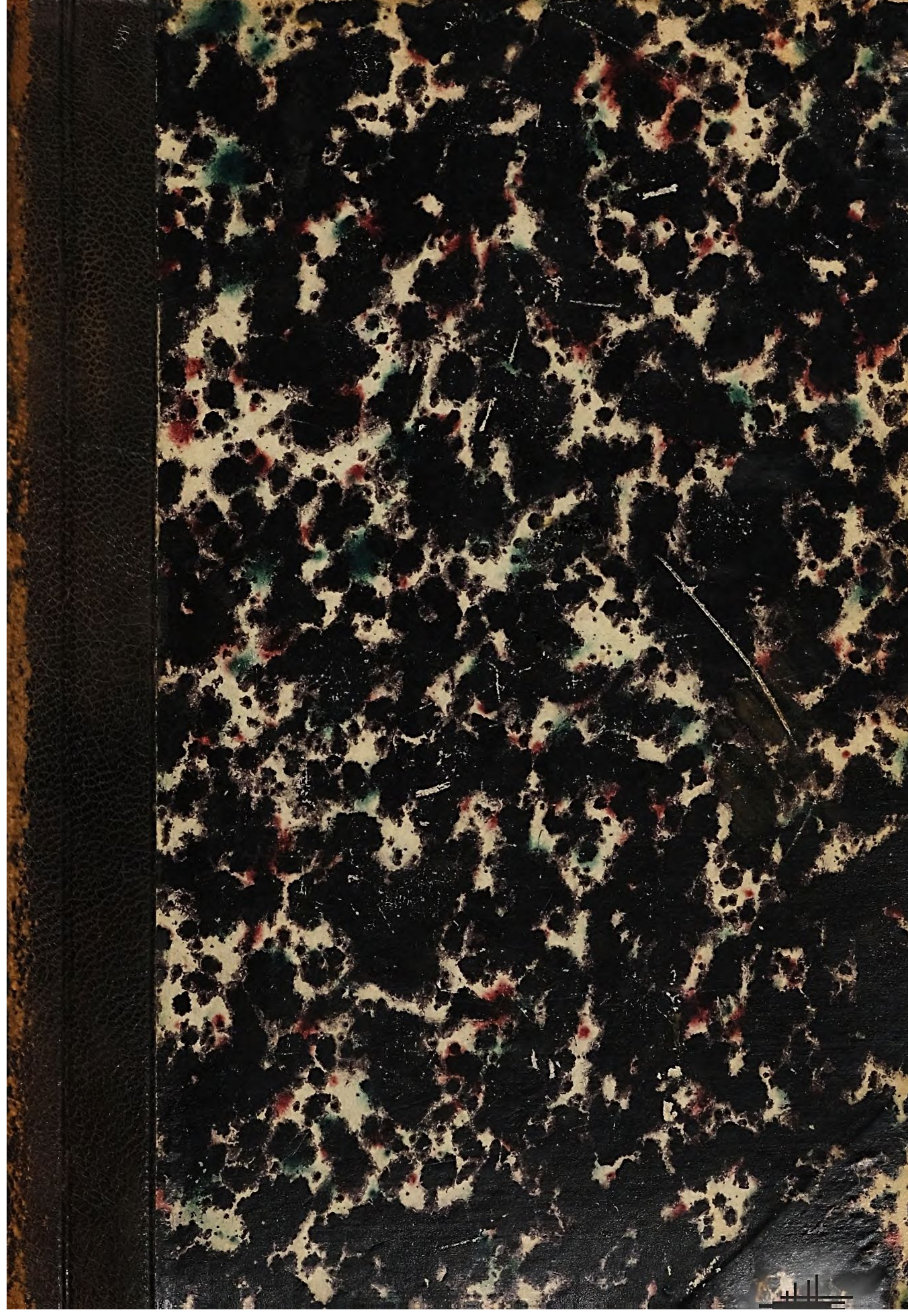




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THE PROFESSOR'S WOOING.

BY

ELSA D'ESTERRE-KEELING.

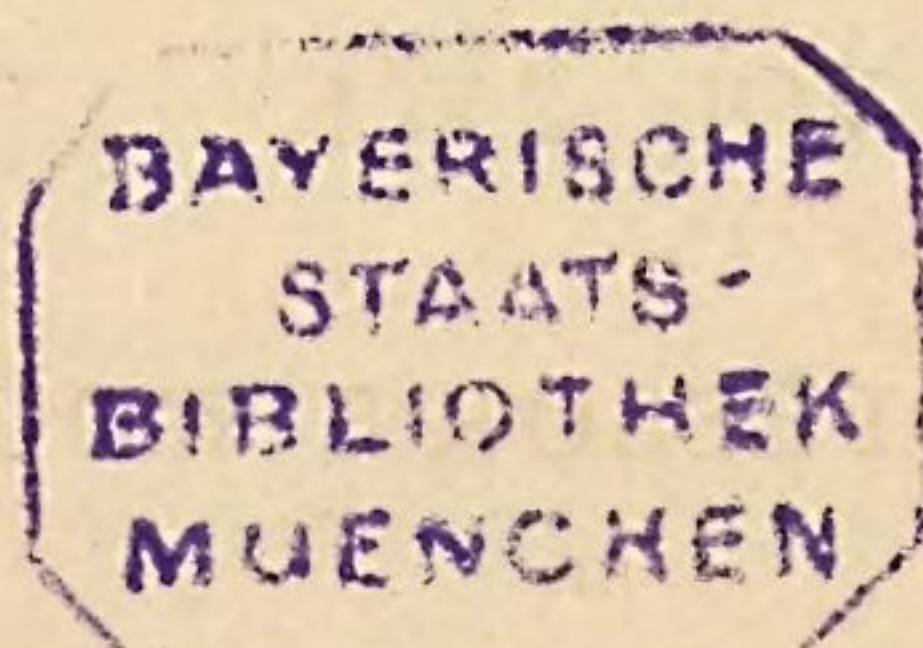
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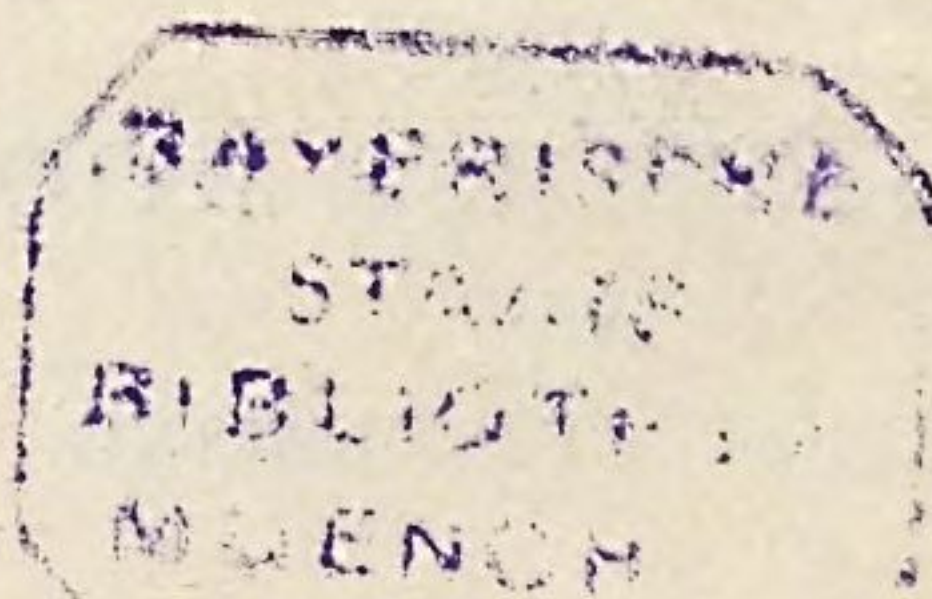
ELSA D'ESTERRE-KEELING.

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By the same Author,

THREE SISTERS		1 vol.
A LAUGHING PHILOSOPHER		1 vol.



THE
PROFESSOR'S WOOING.

BEING THE COURTSHIPS OF
MONSIEUR LA MIE.

BY
ELSA D'ESTERRE-KEELING,
AUTHOR OF "THREE SISTERS," ETC.

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LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1887.

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TO
MY AUNT
EMMA D'ESTERRE-HUGHES,
IN MEMORY OF
OUR SUMMER SOJOURN AT
LES PLANS.

L'ENVOI.

WE much have heard in these late days
From friends across the waters,
Of John Bull and his little ways,
His Home, his Wife, his Daughters.

The theme is not exhausted yet:
John Bull is many-sided;
Whereas, if fun you'd wish to get
In France, and some have tried it,—

Monsieur as Spouse you need not seek,
He's flatter than ditchwater;
His Wife and he they scarcely speak,
And, oh! who'd be his Daughter?

But stay!—to every man his time,
As *Garçon* do but find him.
Monsieur *épris* is quite sublime,—
John Bull here falls behind him.

D'E.-K.

CONTENTS.

	Page
CHAPTER I.	
Geneva.—A curious Note-Book.—A Pessimist	13
CHAPTER II.	
Mesdames la Mie and Minard.—Exchange of Daughters.—And an embarrassing Interview	16
CHAPTER III.	
Genevese Aristocracy.—Nicolette asserts herself	24
CHAPTER IV.	
Madame la Mie's Reply to Nicolette.—Nicolette and her Brother.—“Belles Pensées”	29
CHAPTER V.	
Madame la Mie takes Alarm, and Monsieur la Mie for once loses his Self-Possession.—A Breakfast-Table.—First Meeting between the Professor and Margaret	34
CHAPTER VI.	
A Baker's Dozen.—Madame Morel's Academy.—First Introduction of Marie Minard	42
CHAPTER VII.	
An Introduction and a Smile	45
CHAPTER VIII.	
The Mistresses' Room before Breaking-up.—Curious Unanimity of Purpose	47
CHAPTER IX.	
Laughter in the Mistresses' Room, and a Poet's Magnanimity	52
CHAPTER X.	
Eugénie Roland	55
CHAPTER XI.	
The Pension Edelweiss and its Proprietress	59

	Page
CHAPTER XII.	
The Steamer to Villeneuve, and a Look back at Geneva	62
CHAPTER XIII.	
Passing the Piers.—What the Germans call “Gemüth”	65
CHAPTER XIV.	
Passing Chillon	68
CHAPTER XV.	
Villeneuve Fisherfolk.—First Appearance of Monsieur Meunier and Monsieur Meunier’s Horse.—Madame la Mie on a Cart-Wheel	70
CHAPTER XVI.	
Started.—A Drive uphill, and Arrival at the Edelweiss	75
CHAPTER XVII.	
Margaret’s Illness, Revelations, Recovery, and the eccentric Captain	81
CHAPTER XVIII.	
The Captain’s Sister.—The Family Peachum.—A Talk in the Arbour between Miss Macnab and Miss Peachum	86
CHAPTER XIX.	
Olympia dresses.—Two chaste white Rosebuds.—Paintings in Sepia.—Olympia blushes	93
CHAPTER XX.	
Scruples.—Miss Peachum’s Uncle.—Not a marrying Man.—Monsieur la Mie in a State of Incertitude	100
CHAPTER XXI.	
Margaret Winkelried writes a Letter	105
CHAPTER XXII.	
Surprise.—Humour	108
CHAPTER XXIII.	
Monsieur Louis Auguier.—Entry into the Rose des Alpes.—The Sitting-Room at the Rose des Alpes	111
CHAPTER XXIV.	
Miss Scollop deeply offends Monsieur Louis Auguier.—The View from Miss Scollop’s Window	117
CHAPTER XXV.	
“L’autre” and his Milking-Stool.—Monsieur la Mie unconsciously “sits” for his Portrait	120
CHAPTER XXVI.	
Man and Urchin	126
CHAPTER XXVII.	
Monsieur la Mie raises his Hat.—The Luscombe-Binnses	128

	Page
CHAPTER XXVIII.	
Why the Luscombe-Binnsses were in Mourning.—Margery a “Fiddle”	134
CHAPTER XXIX.	
Rain, English and Foreign.—The Professor’s Experience at Bath.— Rained?—It poured	140
CHAPTER XXX.	
Beauty’s Triumph.—Questions suggested by the Rain.—Miss Macnab’s Hat	143
CHAPTER XXXI.	
Further Events of the Morning.—Alpenstocks and English Vandalism	150
CHAPTER XXXII.	
“What say?”—A full blue Eye	157
CHAPTER XXXIII.	
Miss Scollop’s Sense of Smell	161
CHAPTER XXXIV.	
The Dinner-Table at the Rose des Alpes	165
CHAPTER XXXV.	
The Nondescript young Woman seeks Refuge in Flight	168
CHAPTER XXXVI.	
Madame Morel receives a Letter from Madame Roland	172
CHAPTER XXXVII.	
Madame Morel before the Party	176
CHAPTER XXXVIII.	
Three fat Ladies, the Sofa, and Madame Morel’s Humiliation.—Tea at the Edelweiss.—Whist	180
CHAPTER XXXIX.	
Monsieur la Mie’s Sense of Propriety is offended, and his Vanity receives a Shock	185
CHAPTER XL.	
Madame Morel returns, Marie Minard effects an Escape, and Monsieur la Mie sets out for the Rose des Alpes	190
CHAPTER XLI.	
Complications brought about by Babette	195
CHAPTER XLII.	
Modesty and a Collision	200
CHAPTER XLIII.	
A Gentleman’s Arm	205
CHAPTER XLIV.	
The Beauregard Episode.—Eugénie sets her last Snare	207

	Page
CHAPTER XLV.	
Monsieur la Mie looks before and after.—Paul Pry	213
CHAPTER XLVI.	
Mainly a Discourse on Women's Men	219
CHAPTER XLVII.	
Boarding-House Party on a rainy Evening.—Die asks, "May I dress up?"	227
CHAPTER XLVIII.	
Die "dressed up"	242
CHAPTER XLIX.	
A Lady with a sharp Voice.—Marie Minard unhappy.—Miss Scollop compromised	246
CHAPTER L.	
Meeting at Night between Monsieur la Mie and Franz Bürger.—"Very good," says a Woman's Voice.—Margaret and Auguier Junior take a Morning Walk	252
CHAPTER LI.	
Arrangements for second Duel.—Telegrams	257
CHAPTER LII.	
Nicolette on her Way to Les Plans.—The Meeting with "Mother" .	260
CHAPTER LIII.	
The Duel	265
CHAPTER LIV.	
A Breakfast "Al Fresco"	268
CHAPTER LV.	
Exodus of the Children.—"Poor Captain Macnab!"	273
CHAPTER LVI.	
Return of the Children.—"Bonsoir, Monsieur le Capitaine!" . . .	275
CHAPTER LVII.	
The perfect Brother	278
CHAPTER LVIII.	
Extraordinary Conduct of Miss Macnab.—"My Gracious, Walter, you make me quite uncomfortable!"	280
CHAPTER LIX.	
The Wedding.—The Wedding-Breakfast.—"I'm glad I'm married" .	284
CHAPTER LX.	
The End, partly linguistic, partly sentimental	300



THE PROFESSOR'S WOOING.

CHAPTER I.

GENEVA.—A CURIOUS NOTE-BOOK.—A PESSIMIST.

I CAN never think of Geneva but I see again its chimney-pots. Rows upon rows of pipes, long, thin, and black, stretch up and out and across, like so many craning necks or so many beseeching arms—wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful; and yet, well-a-day! only chimney-pots. You certainly get the finest view of these from the Rue de la Croix d'Or, and here, at No. 29, dwelt Monsieur la Mie, out of sight of lake and mountain, in the very heart of the city. A philosopher (and such was Monsieur la Mie) does not want lake and mountain. Michelet said, in face of these Alps, that they had an air of superb indifference for us below; an air—should he say it?—of insolence. Goethe said, in face of these Alps, that he thought nothing and felt nothing. Who, then, shall blame my hero that he, in face of these Alps, took refuge among the chimney-pots?

At the time here under discussion Monsieur la Mie was one of the lions of Geneva, and well he might be so; for has it not been said that he was a philosopher? The new religion that he preached was pleasing to the Genevese, as indeed all religion, lay or otherwise, is wel-

come in Geneva, which is, and ever has been, the city of preachers. Here Calvin preached; here Voltaire preached; here Rousseau preached; here Madame de Stael preached; here the Salvation Army preached. Geneva was proud of Monsieur la Mie, the latest of its motley assemblage of preachers, for many reasons. Not only as a philosopher had he spoken; he had written books! His personal advantages were great and many; to mention only two—he was a bachelor and was good-looking. Lastly—case unparalleled in the annals of philosophy—this man of thought and learning, this new philosopher, was (*rumour said*) always in love.

“Pooh! ‘*rumour said!*’” exclaims some one. “Who in the world believes what rumour says?” My reply to this is, Almost every one. To the few select who do not, I cannot truthfully say I myself belong. Having found what rumour has said in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred turn out to be true, I all but invariably credit her. Not as a matter of hearsay, however, but as a positive fact, be it added that Monsieur la Mie, if not in love on the particular evening with which this chapter deals, was—thinking of a lady.

And thereby hangs a tale.

* * * * *

Monsieur la Mie was a pessimist; not one of your disagreeable, tight-buttoned pessimists, but one of those kindlier, gentler disciples of Schopenhauer who, with smiling resignation, view humanity generally, and you and me in particular, as an appalling, but not altogether uninteresting phenomenon.

It was probably to counteract the occasional fits of melancholy to which he was subject, in common with the

most cheerful of those who uphold this not enlivening philosophy, that Monsieur la Mie permitted himself to indulge in his capacity for periodically falling in love. He himself was wont to say that his reason for yielding to this apparent weakness in his character was, that he was never to himself a more curious, nay, he might say fascinating study, than when in love. In connection with this statement, let me hasten to say how being in love affected him.

When convinced that he was *épris*, or as he said, *éperdument épris*, it was Monsieur la Mie's custom to enter the fact in a note-book beside his own and the lady's name, the latter in disguised spelling. Thus a Miss Smith is humorously entered as "Sims Thims." The impartial Briton will allow that we have in this a delicate stroke of French politeness.

Under a memorandum of such a nature Monsieur la Mie would write:

"Supposing I married her." (In his own language: *Si je l'épousais.*)

Then came what a musician would doubtless call a dotted interval, as follows:—

.

Some of those who knew the Professor best, surmise—and I think they have plausibility on their side—that these dots, amounting in all to twenty and one, represented Monsieur la Mie's twenty and one reasons for and against marrying Sims Thims, or whoever else the lady might be; for the same mysterious signs were repeated on page after page of the note-book. That, meanwhile, up to the time at which this story commences, the reasons against must

have in every instance outnumbered the reasons for, seems to be proved by the fact that up to this time the resolution penned at foot of the dotted interval is invariably, "I will not marry her"—a resolution which bears a striking similarity to that arrived at by a certain English gentleman of the olden time.

Was it possible, now asks the reader, that this man of method was about to pen words different beneath the latest name? That I may not yet divulge. As has already been related, he stood at his window. To all appearance he was studying the chimney-pots, but—this I may divulge, and gladly do, for the benefit of all who love romance—he stood in that position in which, if not literally, at least metaphorically speaking, the outer world and all its objects—most of all, its chimney-pots—fall on what opticians call the blind spot of the eye. In other words, he was absorbed in thought, and thought not altogether pessimistic, to judge from the smile which every now and then crossed his face; and whereof more hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

MESDAMES LA MIE AND MINARD.—EXCHANGE OF DAUGHTERS.
—AND AN EMBARRASSING INTERVIEW.

THERE is, it is pretty widely acknowledged, no greater marvel which comes under our daily notice than the obtuseness in our neighbour which makes him blind to the fact that to mention his house or his wife or anything that is his, in the same breath with *our* house or *our* wife or anything that is ours, is simply ludicrous, and makes us feel that it would be a charity to enlighten him. A feeling very like this had come to exist between Madame la Mie, the mother of our Professor, and Madame Minard,

a lady of her acquaintance, and mother of somebody else. It was, quoth Madame Minard, altogether absurd to see Madame la Mie's pride in her son; and so it was. In fact—next to Madame Minard's pride in her daughter—it was the funniest thing you could see.

To Madame la Mie it not only seemed that her son François was a star of the first magnitude, but she maintained he outshone the sons and daughters of every one else, very much as such a star might outshine any number of rushlights. Well, that is a sort of pride that can be endured for a time, but not for ever. For a time, moreover, as it happened, there was no one more popular with all the mothers of Geneva than this same François la Mie; which was natural enough, for no one knew better than he how to make pretty speeches to the girls—and, after all, matrimony has always begun with pretty speeches—no one better than he how to make pretty speeches to themselves, and matrimony somehow always seems nearer when the pretty speeches are made to the mothers. In fact, no one could be more charming all round than he, while he seemed to each individual mother to have a silent preference.

With Madame la Mie it was different. You may have a marked liking for a lady's unmarried, clever, rising son, and in your heart of hearts may see all his attractions; but when it comes to his mother's praising him, not only at the expense of humanity at large, but more especially and most unmistakably in terms which imply his superiority to—*your daughter*, a little indignation is pardonable, and though one may wonder at the hardihood in Madame Minard, one cannot help admiring her for saying, as she did say, at a supper given by the Rolands, that she, for her part, could see "nothing to

rave about" in François la Mie; that, take him at his best, he was "well enough and nothing more" (*"Fort gentil, et voilà tout"*). Of course, one feels sorry that the thing was said; for by the time it reached Madame la Mie it had swelled to an insult of unheard-of dimensions. That lady smiled and rubbed her hands, and said this was very amusing, as coming from Madame Minard; and, pray, how might the Rolands have looked, and had there not been great laughter? It really was quite, quite too funny. After saying which she went home and almost cried her heart out.

Truly, she was a tried woman. Here an addition to her chapter of sorrows:

All over the Continent, but more especially in Germany and Switzerland, there is a custom that families temporarily exchange daughters. Suppose yourself to be the head of what has been called a daughterful house; suppose yourself to be a German, and your eldest girl to have done with school, though still in her teens. You keep her at home for a year or so, and initiate her into the mysteries of the culinary art. Against she has learnt how the apple got into the dumpling, in five cases out of ten Herr Gutmann makes a proposal, and Gretchen becomes a bride, while yet in her teens.

Then begin the joy-bells. But, alas! as any arithmetician can see, this leaves five other cases in which Herr Gutmann does not present himself, and Gretchen, as the Germans say, "*bleibt sitzen*;" and her teens slip by.

Then begins something very like groaning and gnashing of teeth, and it is in this latter case mostly that the German mother avails herself of the custom above described; that is to say, she exchanges daughters with the

Swiss mother, after a preliminary advertisement has been inserted to this rather primitive effect in a Swiss paper:

“Wanted a quiet, peaceful home in Switzerland for a German maiden, who will help the housewife; offered in return a pious, quiet home in Germany to a Swiss maiden, who will help the housewife.”

Follow voluminous correspondence between the two mothers; whereupon the Swiss maiden travels northward to the German home, and the German maiden southward to the Swiss home—to each maiden thus being given an opportunity of learning the language of the other, minus great expense, because, you understand, she “helps the housewife.”

I should, perhaps, not have described this custom so elaborately, but that it was in consequence of it that Margaret Winkelried became an inmate of Madame la Mie’s household, and—— Stay, I anticipate your question.

Is this, you ask, the lady mentioned some pages back, as occupying the thoughts of Monsieur la Mie? this the explanation of the smile, it also mentioned some pages back, as flitting every now and then across the face of the Professor? Alas! I dare not say. Cruel though it seem, I still must keep in abeyance the mention of that lady’s name—still must withhold the explanation of that smile. Were it usual for authors to confess to fallibility, I might go so far as to admit that it was, perhaps, not wise to represent my hero at so early a period of my story as thinking of any woman other than the muse; that it was precipitate to betray the fact of his bursting into a smile at a time when I might have known (and, indeed, did know) that circumstances would make it necessary for me to occupy myself with his sister, to the all but total exclusion of himself, for some pages to come;

nay, when I was aware that, not to blink the truth, it was, artistically speaking, quite impossible to couple with the mention of those romantic circumstances any interpretation thereof.

The name of Monsieur la Mie's sister was Nicolette; and if, as a clever Frenchman has said, the first duty of a young woman is to be healthy, Mademoiselle la Mie deserved all praise. She had nothing about her of the moon moony, no æsthetic pallor, no furrows of thought; she had a face bringing light with it, and the step and the laugh of a child. She was not beautiful, but wondrous pretty, with the prettiness of her namesake in the old French story, that Nicolette of whom Mr. Pater has told us, with the "little lips very red, the teeth small and white"—a prettiness in Nicolette la Mie sufficient to cause a certain merry, easy-going, idle young Englishman to turn quite suddenly dismally and abnormally industrious; to induce him to give up as stale, flat, and unprofitable all such generally approved pursuits as boating, cricketing, and tennis; and to be discovered reading, nay, *devouring*, especially on rainy days, not novels—though one likes to fancy rainy days Nature's graceful provision for the benefit of novelists—but a ponderous tome, with the suggestive title, "Ici on parle Français," which tome he would every now and then close, and whisper to empty air things so extraordinary (for example—in French, of course—"Will you take a walk with me, miss? No, sir; I prefer to walk with my grandmother") that it was indeed not strange that his nearest and dearest by ties thicker than water, his mother and sisters, took serious alarm.

When to this phenomenon was added a most curious display of unwillingness to answer, in a simple and intelligible manner, the question put with studied artless-

ness, "Tell us, who is your French teacher, Ned?" maternal solicitude reached its climax, and the young man's mother was moved to make inquiries, the result of which was that, in an incredibly short space of time, she confided in a whisper to her special friend, "My dear, I know what I know," which small phrase, vague though no doubt it sound to the masculine ear, as used by a woman signifies that, whatever the subject in hand, she knows concerning it more than man, poor thing, ever knew concerning any subject under the sun.

The name of the man in this case was Ned Piggott—an' it please you better, Ted Piggott. Some called him by one, and some by the other name. A few—his sisters, for instance—called him Neddy, varied with Teddy. All of this the young man suffered with seraphic good temper, though why nonsense like this in the matter of Christian names should run riot in John Bull's island more than in any other country in the inhabited globe, one rather fails to understand. While on the subject, I crave permission to submit the following jottings, made in connection with cases which have come under my own immediate notice:—A stately, elderly couple call each other Y and X. Their Christian names in full—though probably existing in the register of their births, and possibly to appear on their tombstones—are to this day unknown to a large majority of their friends, including the present writer. A girl and her brother are called Pearl and Ruby. Another small boy is introduced as Pink, and on one's blandly asking to see Skyblue and the rest of the family, one is accused of gross impertinence. A little girl says her name is Toby, and that she and Piggy are twins (Piggy turns out to be her brother). A young married couple call each other Muggy

and Puggy, this being the happy version of mother and father hit on by their first-born. One relates this to an acquaintance, and is told of a similiar case in which the names are Muffins and Puffins. So much for infantile ingenuity in the denomination of parents. Hero-worship I have always thought a beautiful thing, but it seems to me hard on a boy to christen him Mudge, because that happens to be the name of your pet clergyman; and when my cousin Smith tells me his Christian name is Potts, I somehow dismally feel that Pans would not be worse. Tommy one hails, if not as a beautiful, at least as a rational and healthy name, but is rather surprised when Tommy appears on the scene, a small chub of a girl. This prepares one for Jimmy, who confides to you (at least, she did so to me) that her parents in an unhappy hour had her christened Jemina; and you feel not a scrap surprised when Johnny and Billy (not Jane and Sybilla, please) turn out to be girls. They talk of one Harry, and you ask what sort is she. "*She?* Why, Harry isn't a girl!" And Johnny and Billy blush. That, of course, you never expected, and begin to feel unhappy.

So much for what's in a name. To return to the multinomial young man who gave rise to this discourse. The name of Ned's French professor it is perhaps needless to say. Enough to record that after his eighth lesson with this gentleman, up and spoke the young Englishman—

"Do I speak French like a fool, monsieur?"

"Like a fool?" Monsieur la Mie repeated the words. "Like a fool?" A little laugh finished the sentence.

Ned Piggott was not inordinately vain, but he would have been inordinately modest—which he was also not

—had he interpreted the professor's answer otherwise than he did, as a compliment. He smiled.

"The fact is, Professor, I—I love a countrywoman of yours, and—— Well, I don't know anything more to say than that"—his handsome face beaming with hope and happiness—"I love a countrywoman of yours."

"And you wish to tell her so in French?"

"No; but I wish to tell her mother so."

"Ahem!" The Professor was seized with a slight convulsion of the lungs.

"What does that mean?" asked Ned Piggott, not satisfied that in this sudden attack of coughing there was not more than met the ear.

Monsieur la Mie took a nib from his desk and held it to the light, with the apparent desire of getting a bird's-eye view of the world through a very small aperture in it. In reality nothing so trivial was in his thoughts, and the act, of which he himself was possibly unconscious, was merely the outcome of passing nervousness. Still, peering with all his might, and at the imminent risk of producing strabismus for life, through the tiny hole in it, he replied—

"I mean that if madame does not know English, I think—er—I should advise your mastering French a *little* more before you offer yourself as a son-in-law."

"There!" Ned Piggott sprang to his feet. "Why did you not tell me at once I spoke French like a fool?"

The Professor put down the nib, and laughed outright.

* * * * *

"Odd young fellow!" he commented some five minutes later, in the course of retailing the conversation to his mother.

That lady stroked her chin. What struck her as still more odd was that François did not appear to see that the young Englishman's charmer was none other than their Nicolette. This Madame la Mie had suspected for some time past, was now convinced of it, and disapproved.

CHAPTER III.

GENEVESE ARISTOCRACY.—NICOLETTE ASSERTS HERSELF.

MADAME LA MIE had her plans for Nicolette. The latter was to marry no less a personage than one Bernard Beauregard de Belendroit. If you know anything of Genevese society you must have heard this name, a magnificent-sounding one, the existence of which and of names similar in a land calling itself a republic is slightly mystifying, until you discover that it is merely the combination of the family name and that of the family country seat. The Beauregards de Belendroit pique themselves on two things: the first that they are staunch democrats, by which they will tell you they mean great sticklers for the good old ways and the good old blood; the second that they lead and have always led what in this city of Geneva is called the *vie Anglaise*, or English life. In connection with this term, and another of the same kind (*vie Parisienne*), I cannot help saying that a thing which I like about the Genevese is the humorous spirit which leads them to confront the French and English tourist with burlesques, the happiest conceivable, of life as led in France and England. What they are pleased to call the *vie Anglaise* is the life of elegant dismaldom led by their upper ten, a really diverting caricature of existence as endured in some unhappy

homes of England. What they dub the *vie Parisienne* is the life of would-be fashion led by their lesser grandees; it, in its turn, an equally clever caricature of the *monde où l'on s'ennuie* to be found in Paris.

The family Beauregard de Belendroit was, as has been said, of the select who lead the *vie Anglaise*. At the time of which I write, and at which Bernard Beauregard de Belendroit had equally astonished and gratified Madame la Mie by making an offer of his hand and heart to Nicolette, he was forty-three. The age is not without its merit. At a party given not long ago in this same city of Geneva, at which the ages of the gentlemen present were asked, the four oldest-looking among them made statements, palpably mendacious, to the effect that they were—forty-three. This fact would lead one to conclude that in Geneva the age has special charms; and that it therefore was the age of Bernard Beauregard de Belendroit might have been no drawback. What one must, however, regard as having been serious detractions in his case, are the facts that he was of ungainly exterior; that he had a slouching walk and a bad carriage; that he had that smile which is on the lips and in the eyes, but makes neither lips nor eyes move; that he gave you his hand in a curve, and kept his lips parted after laughing; that, viewing him in his *tout ensemble*, he had about him something impossible to describe and indescribably odious.

Though Madame la Mie might (and did) overlook all this in view of his patrician name, it was not to be expected that Nicolette would. And she did not.

It was the morning after the conversation between Madame la Mie and her son, in the course of which Ma-

dame la Mie's fears concerning the studious Englishman had been confirmed. She turned to her daughter.

"I have a word to say to you, Nicolette."

"Yes, mother."

Nicolette rather wondered what the "word" would turn out to be. She was not left long in suspense.

"I have given Monsieur Beauregard de Belendroit permission to call on you to-day at one o'clock," said her mother, as calmly as though the announcement were one of the most ordinary things in the world. "He comes to make you an offer of his hand."

"Why, mother!" exclaimed Nicolette. "You are surely jesting."

Madame la Mie's face looked about as expressive of the comic emotion as that of the Sphinx. She replied frigidly—

"I am not aware that I am a fool, Nicolette. I may be so; *no doubt I am*. If I might say a few further words without being charged with acting the part of a clown, the course I should advise you to follow is—— What is the matter?"

Nicolette's face had passed through various changes as her mother spoke. At first something like a smile had lurked in the corners of her mouth; that had passed, and her eyes had turned dim. Next a wave of crimson colour had spread over cheeks and brow; that had passed, and her sweet child-face grew pitiful in its whiteness. This mother of hers was ready to sell her for life to the highest bidder. She clenched one hand.

"*Why* should I marry this Bernard Beauregard de Belendroit? That the sister of François la Mie may be a grand lady? I will not! I have effaced myself always. I cannot do this." She rose as she spoke and stood be-

fore her mother, trembling with indignation. "Nobody dares dispose of me," she added. "I am my own."

It was early morning. The sun streamed in at the window, and lighted into beauty the young impassioned face.

"That is what a girl always says when she is another's," replied her mother, if possible, with an increase of coldness. "Silence!" as Nicolette attempted to speak. "I have my eyes, and know your secret. Spare me this playing at tragedy, and be so good as to tell me to what you object in Monsieur Beauregard de Belendroit."

"To what I object in him? To everything;—to himself, his rank, his wealth! How could he think I would marry him for himself? How dares he think I would marry him for money, or a name?"

"Pooh! English drama! May I ask for what you would marry?"

Nicolette rises, and this time something finer than sunlight lights her face. She answers simply and bravely, "For love—and help. Be it English drama or not, I think a woman needs love; I am sure she needs help."

Ah! you merry lad Ned, did your frank blue eyes and handsome face deserve that?

* * * * *

"Good morning, mother." It was the voice of François. "Good morning, Nicolette." He saluted them both on both cheeks. "Why, sister mine, you grow prettier every day. As you stand at the window, your hair is like a glory."

"François, François! Compliments even to your sister! Come to breakfast."

Not long afterwards the family were seated at that meal. Contrary to her wont, for she was not of those who read the morning paper regularly, Nicolette on this

particular morning took up the *Journal de Genève*, and hid herself and her tear-dimmed eyes behind it. Were there any such thing as chance, one would say it was chance of the strangest kind that on this particular morning there appeared right in front of those tear-dimmed eyes an advertisement, similar to, if not identical with, the one given some pages back—an advertisement offering to a Swiss maiden, in the usual style, the advantages of a German home, in return for the advantages of a Swiss home to a German maiden. Nicolette read it once, twice, three times—mechanically, as one reads through tear-dimmed eyes; as men and women with aching, breaking hearts read advertisements at a railway station, spelling out the words and not taking in the sense.

“Wanted in exchange . . .”

As she read it for the fourth time, the meaning dawned on her. Dashing the tears from her eyes, she pointed to the advertisement, and, passing the paper to her mother, said quietly, with a certain determination of manner which had lately come to her—

“Will you read that, mother?”

Madame la Mie took off her spectacles. Some people put on their spectacles when they wish to see well; Madame la Mie was not of these. Not until she had read the advertisement did she put on her spectacles again, and, taking a large mouthful of bread—some people do not eat when about to speak; Madame la Mie was also not of these—said, with somewhat thick utterance—

“Well, Nicolette?”

François, who had contrived to read the advertisement across the table, said the same words in almost the same breath; then, in sheer absent-mindedness, buttered his bread a second time.

The girl had apparently never before made herself the subject of conversation on the part at once of her mother and brother. Her face wore a look half amused, half constrained, at the effect produced by this unusual conduct of hers. Then she said—

“I should like to take the place of this German girl, mother. Can she take mine?”

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME LA MIE'S REPLY TO NICOLETTE.—NICOLETTE AND HER BROTHER.—“BELLES PENSÉES.”

MADAME LA MIE had been sipping her tea out of her teaspoon when her daughter spoke. She put her spoon into her cup, her cup and saucer on her plate; then pushed cup, saucer, and plate from her preparatory to replying. There are a number of people outside this land of ours who find it impossible to deliver themselves of one connected sentence at any meal, without thus clearing some square yard of table before them.

“You wish to leave us, Nicolette,” she then said. “Pray why? I am perfectly satisfied with the way in which you help me in the house.”

Nicolette flushed, and explained that she had reason to believe this; that, in the present instance, she was actuated by the wish—ignoble, perhaps, but not unprecedented—to “better herself.”

Madame la Mie again took off her spectacles, this time to submit her daughter to inspection. Monsieur la Mie, with a piece of butter poised contemplatively on the tip of his knife, also studied Nicolette. She evidently presented a new and curious aspect to both.

Having taken a thorough scrutiny of her, Madame la

Mie at least replied to her question. "I think I understand you, Nicolette. You ask may you leave us. Of course you may. You are completely at liberty to follow your interest, when, where, and *as* you like."

This was said with freezing politeness and a dignity not to be gainsaid; as, indeed, nothing short of prejudice could make any one deny that in matter of dignity Madame la Mie had few equals. Her tone and gestures were not as are those of others; even her dress was peculiarly her own. The ordinary Swiss makes the day hideous by wearing a morning-gown till noon. Not so Madame la Mie. Not that she followed what on the Continent is called "the English fashion," either. Put on a dress, put on collar and cuffs, for breakfast! *Dieu sait quoi!* No; it was Madame la Mie's custom to don on rising an old coat of her husband's—*le cher défunt*, as she called him. There were some who maintained that the "dear defunct" had, whilst living, not been so dear to Madame la Mie; but then, there are always some ready to indulge in the pleasures of malignity, else had there been no need of that prohibition concerning evil-speaking and slandering. There was an inscription (black on white) on the slab surmounting the tomb of *La Mie, L'Aîné*, stating that he had left an inconsolable widow. What just now it were more to the point to know—how many old coats he left—has never been ascertained; but to her dying day Madame la Mie wore old coats of his. What wonder that she looked not as other women look? A person of moderate air could not go about as she did, from daybreak to sundown, apparelled in the coats of her defunct husband, said coats growing, as the years rolled by, more and more rusty, more and more antique, without this giving her something out of the common. When

it comes to this, that a person in herself very striking-looking, adopted such a garb, I put it to the reader, must she not have looked one of the most peculiar of her species? So did Madame la Mie.

"I presume," she said, rising and whisking her pocket-handkerchief out of her coat-tail pocket—"I presume you have understood what I have said, Nicolette?"

Excepting Nicolette had been deaf or abnormally stupid, she could hardly have failed to grasp her mother's meaning. She bit her lips, and made no reply. A minute later she sat alone with her brother, the door having closed on her mother's coat-tails. Neither spoke. François was silent, because, truth to say, he was honestly grieved at the thought of losing this bright Nicolette. Nicolette was silent because she was trying to fashion into one compact sentence a piece of advice which she contemplated giving to François. So firmly had she made up her mind on this point that she already began stiffening her neck and pursing her lips, to look the very embodiment of matured wisdom.

Curious to state, when it came to delivering herself of her speech, her courage failed her. She snipped her bread into six little dice, and, keeping her eyes studiously on her plate, gave utterance to the following rather incoherent plea:—

"François, you won't, will you? there's a dear old fellow!"

As far as it went, it was, perhaps, not bad in way of a sister's request. François burst into a laugh, and kissed the bonny pleader.

All this had preceded the advent of Margaret Winkelried, and it was the recollection of this, so please you, that on a certain evening brought the smile to the

face of Monsieur la Mie. As he stood at the window of his house in the Rue de la Croix d'Or, it seemed to the Professor that over the chimney-pots came again that sister's admonition — "François, you won't, will you? there's a dear old fellow!"

With difficulty refraining from laughing outright, he turned back to his desk, muttering as he did so, "What I like about women is their way of expressing themselves. When a man in speaking omits the principal verb, you don't know what he is aiming at. Now, express themselves as they will, there is something very direct about women."

It struck him as rather a good observation and happily worded, so he entered it into a book at once. In that, again, you see the man of method.

While he sits at his desk, I am tempted to say a word on Monsieur la Mie as a writer. As such, be it added, he never received the wide reputation out of Geneva that he received in it. To those persons who asked him how he accounted for this phenomenon, he was wont to say, with that *sans-gêne* which your Frenchman alone preserves when such questions are put to him, that the only reason which he could assign to it ("Sir" or "Madam," as the case might be) was that, alas! his talent was not equal to his genius. Monsieur la Mie had a theory, according to which a man by the possession of talent and genius attained to greatness; by the possession of talent alone, to popularity; by the possession of genius alone, to—nothing. As an instance of this last truth, he would quote himself, unappreciated, he might say, beyond a narrow circle of critics, *d'un goût exquis*. He would at the same time ask you if this idea of his concerning

genius and talent did not strike you as peculiarly original; as, in fact, a *belle pensée*.

It was Monsieur la Mie's fashion when he hit on such ideas, previous to jotting them down—as he invariably did, and a very excellent system that—to strike an attitude and exclaim, “Joli, ça!” He was on such occasions in such ecstatic glee that he became a remarkable illustration of the smile described, I think, in “Alice in Wonderland,” as remaining after the face to which it belonged had vanished. Anything he possessed he would, in the fulness of his heart, have given to you—excepting, of course, that thought. Of the authorship of it so proud was he, and so fearful of its suffering the slightest damage, that not to any one would he have trusted the little naked thing, but it must first be clothed and beribboned and hugged by himself. And not only the bosom of Monsieur la Mie swelled upon such occasions; Frau Goethe's well-known exclamation sinks into commonplace compared with what was at such times the motherly pride of Madame la Mie. For years it was this lady's firm conviction that any work which made a sensation was a production of her son's, published under an assumed name. It was long before she could be brought to credit the existence of a poet now well known, so positive was she that his name was one assumed by François. What made her sure of this was that the sentiments expressed by him were, she declared, exactly the sentiments of her son, and clothed in her son's inimitable language. As if—*je vous en prie*—she would not know the language of her son anywhere! When forced to relinquish this fond idea, she by no means ceased to identify François with every other rising star. For some time previous to the date of Margaret's advent he had been collecting materials

for his *magnum opus*; whether it was to be in prose or poetry, a work of the imagination or a gigantic outcome of thought, whether light or heavy, long or short, Madame la Mie knew not, but of that much she was certain—it was to be a work which would make an epoch in contemporary literature.

This and more, did she confide to Margaret ere that young person had been one hour in her house. She wished from the outset to impress this simple parson's daughter with a full sense of the high position of her son; to prevent from the beginning the possibility of this German girl's aspiring to make her residence at No. 29 of the Rue de la Croix d'Or permanent. She was the more desirous of making this clear, that she had already other and far more ambitious hopes with reference to her son François and the question matrimonial.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME LA MIE TAKES ALARM, AND MONSIEUR LA MIE FOR
ONCE LOSES HIS SELF-POSSESSION.—A BREAKFAST-TABLE.
FIRST MEETING BETWEEN THE PROFESSOR AND MARGARET.

To all the praise of François, Margaret Winkelried listened with “lips where smiles crept out and in,” the reason of which circumstance never once struck Madame la Mie, so thoroughly did she warm to her subject. What did, however, strike her when she had come to an end of her eloquence, and had time to take a quiet survey of Margaret, after the fashion in which women take quiet surveys of each other (it is all over in a minute, like the drawing of a tooth; and in some instances gives unspeakable anguish, like the same process), was that this was a case of a girl exasperatingly pretty—pretty from

top to toe, with a simply maddening resemblance to the ideal type of German girl.

Madame la Mie's mind was made up. She tapped at the door of her son's study.

"You here, *mon ami*?"

François looked up from his writing-table, rose, and placed a chair beside it for his mother.

Carefully raising her coat-tails, that eccentric lady sat down. "What are you busy at now?"

"*Ma foi!*" The Professor smiled. "Nothing of great importance; I am indexing my collection of *belles pensées*. I own"—the smile on his face deepened—"I now and then meet with a thought which I like. Take, for instance, this on Style: 'Art,' says Bacon, 'is Man adding his soul to Nature.' Now, notice; I change the metaphor slightly, and give you this definition of Style: Man adding his individuality to Art. *Parbleu!* I fancy that beats Buffon;" and the Professor proceeded to index this outcome of a happy moment under four letters, standing for Bacon, Art, Buffon, and Style.

"Buffon indeed!" Madame la Mie curled her lip. "*Mon ami*, you are simply dazzling."

And was this mighty brain to be turned by a penniless beauty?

"François," she said, wistfully, "you will find the German pretty."

"I always share your taste, mother."

"Flatterer!" and Madame la Mie raised her forefinger, as only a Frenchwoman can. "I want you to keep your heart whole. *Point de bêtise*, François!"

If there be one French word for which more than another we have, thank heaven, no English equivalent, it is this.

"Tell me, how many have you now on your books?" continued Madame la Mie leaning back and stroking the breast of her coat, much as its original owner might have done in his lifetime.

"In my heart, you mean," corrected her son, as he laid his hand dramatically on the seat of his emotions. Then, having recourse to his fingers to enumerate the different names in that wonderful note-book, he added, "Lucile (my name for her), an Englishwoman whom I met on the pier, one. Eyes like the sea (ah, those English eyes!); mouth English in every line (a little too haughty, perhaps, that English mouth); teeth tiny, receding—the sort I love; ears enravishing; nose *piquant*; and the whole face flushed with rosy colour, even the nose—that English nose is always flushed, to be sure; (*dommage, ça*).” Here Monsieur la Mie grew pensive. “Yet adorable those English faces, all the same.”

“Enough, François. Whom else?”

François laid the forefinger of his right hand against that of his left, and paused to consider whom he should name as next in the order of his admiration. “Number two, the Parisian. Do you not know my Jeannette? Downright ugly; Parisians always are. Eyes small, mouth large, nose turned up (how noses do turn up in Paris!), complexion muddy; in short, not a redeeming feature, but—hands and feet.” Here Monsieur la Mie closed his eyes ecstatically. “A dream of Paris! That puts me in mind of the Englishwoman. It was at her feet I said, ‘I will not marry you.’”

“You ridiculous creature!” Madame la Mie all but succumbed to laughter; though not in the style of your ordinary ladies, however. Hers was a quiet laugh, noticeable only in a slight, trembling motion, causing the coat

of the dear defunct to rise and fall. "Any one else on your books?"

"Well, yes." The Professor, while feigning the utmost composure, stole a peep at his mother to catch the effect of his words. "There is Mademoiselle Minard, with whom I am in love from hearsay, and to whom, by the way, I am promised an introduction."

No sign of rise and fall in the coat of the dear defunct was visible now.

"*Voilà une bêtise!* And what of Eugénie Roland?" said madame, with a frown.

"Eugénie Roland!" The Professor frowned no less; nay, he even went further. "*Diable l'emporte!*" he exclaimed, with Gallic levity, and that irascibility which was ever a feature of the poetic temperament; then, changing his tone and the subject at once, he added coaxingly, "Tell me, what is your German like, mother? Ruddy and flaxen-haired?"

But Madame la Mie still frowned. "I should like to know," she said, "why you never can bear the mention of Eugénie Roland?"

"Because——" Language failing, Monsieur la Mie struck his desk loudly.

Even a French mother cannot go beyond a certain limit. Madame la Mie left the room, and her son resumed his pen. This time, however, he did not continue "indexing." Pen in hand, he sat thinking over the conversation that had taken place between him and his mother. In the course of so doing, he was struck by the somewhat undignified means to which he had had recourse to silence that lady. Now that he had leisure to weigh the matter, he could not help feeling sorry that he had let himself be so carried away by the feeling of the moment,

as, instead of delivering himself of a few calm, well-chosen words, to strike his desk. The door had hardly closed on the maternal coat-tails, when innumerable ideas occurred to him, which, put into words, would, a moment ago, have been appropriate. *Que faire?* To recover his self-respect he dashed off, what I must say I think he rather mendaciously headed, "*Dialogue—My Mother and I, apropos of a worldly wise match.*"

When he had finished this composition, he was struck by the curious improvement which it was on the interview which had really taken place. We have some of us, I dare say, experienced a similar feeling on perusing conversations in which we have taken part, as retailed by ourselves in letter-form to friends. They have, especially our own part therein, in the process of penning, gained a plasticity, a finish, not to say a spiciness, to which, at the time of their delivery, it is all but certain they did not even approach. This remark I remember once making to Monsieur la Mie, who honoured me by admitting that it was not without a flavour of truth; nay, who even went so far as to tell me, in connection with it, of a habit of his, which seems to prove that he had himself at a prior period come to recognize it. It had for years, he assured me, been his practice to jot down in his spare moments not only isolated gems of thought, but imaginary dialogues to which his contribution consisted of replies of a nature aphoristic, humorous, or tender, as seemed most appropriate. In this way, he added, any man of brains might make for himself a repertory of speeches, choosing one of which in time of need—sarcastic, genial, or pathetic, as the situation might demand—he could deliver himself of it with the more effectiveness that at the time of writing it, he would have

settled in his own mind not only the wave of the hand which at the time of delivery would suit it best, but even such minutiae as where in speaking to put the commas and what to italicize. "Thus," he said, with a peculiar smile he had, and which, added to his exceeding great candour, never failed to impress me—"thus by a little foresight and no sparing of labour, I, for instance, if you understand me" (a favourite parenthesis of his), "have contrived to have ever ready something wherewithal to please."

I could only bow assent, and wonder. When making confessions such as this, the Professor seemed to me to become a living embodiment of what we English somehow (perhaps quite erroneously) fancy to be the American conception of sublimity.

Alas that in the interview above recorded, by some strange fatality, Monsieur la Mie had lost his self-possession so completely as not even to attempt mentally to run through his repertory of repartees, therefrom to take something wherewithal, if not to please, at least to crush his mother! How unworthy of a man like him was it to inflict that blow upon his desk!

"After all," he said, starting suddenly from these reflections, "I wonder what the German is like?"

The next morning satisfied his curiosity. It was again eight o'clock a.m., and the breakfast-hour.

I must apologize for introducing the breakfast-hour a second time into these pages. Popular prejudice in the matter of romance is opposed to the morning meal—however foolishly, yet so strongly that nothing short of the maddest presumption could prompt any one to argue against it. I therefore will not argue; but will merely

remark that, be it on my own part folly, from a romantic point of view I am so strongly biassed in favour of the morning meal—that meal at which we sip “dear melancholy coffee” in melancholy silence—that to me it is a lasting marvel why it should figure so seldom as it does in our best approved novels. Why, one cannot help wondering, is no odium attached to lunch; and why fares afternoon tea so well? Wherein lies the special poetry of late dinner; and what sheds the halo over supper?

At one and all of these meals there is, you answer, a possibility of ladies and gentlemen meeting. Is there not the same possibility at breakfast? Nay, if you come to apply the test of the possible, is its range in the matter of ladies and gentlemen meeting not almost limitless?

At breakfast, at eight o'clock a.m., took place the first meeting between Monsieur la Mie and Margaret Winkelried, and it was, it need hardly be said, the oft-told story of “he saw,” “she saw.”

“She saw”—a man decidedly uncommon-looking; no denying that. To give you the details. A striking head—the dark hair clipped behind, but long in front, divided in the centre, and brushed back, a tuft of white at one side, curious in a man so young, being kept carefully in view; the forehead small, womanish; the eyes dark, prominent; the nose broad; the mouth, like eyes, froggish, the chin weak, with a dimple in it; the face clean-shaven.

So much for what she saw. She said, “Falls short of my ideal; shall certainly never like him.” This to herself. Aloud, “Quite well, thank you,” in reply to his inquiry how she felt after her journey.

“He saw”—a girl remarkably beautiful. To give

you the grand touches—a perfect profile, perfect colouring, perfect figure.

He said, "Shall certainly fall in love with her." This to himself. Aloud, "No more, thank you," as she passed him the bread.

Such was the sum of their first conversation. Had the time of day been any other than eight o'clock a.m., they might have said more. As it was, they could hardly have said less. Yet even these few words left their impression on the susceptible heart of the Professor; even these few words inspired Monsieur la Mie with the following fragment, entered into his book of *belles pensées*:—

"Platitude is the mother of the Sublime. To-day she passes me the bread. I say the simple words, 'No more, thank you.' (Mere platitude.) 'To-morrow she will pass me the bread again. Behold a world of possibility! She will pass me the bread again, and I shall say——'" Here we have one of those maddening dotted intervals, after which is the comment, "*Lo, the sublime!*"

It has been conjectured—a little uncharitably, I think—by some who knew the Professor, that what he meant to say when Margaret passed him the bread a second time, and which he apostrophizes as "*Lo, the sublime!*" was, "Thank you; I'll take another slice." I for my part decline to make any suggestion on the subject, as I will candidly confess that I consider the British mind to be incapable of soaring with the French. I also feel that it is only delicate at this point to leave the Professor and Margaret to their own devices for awhile.

CHAPTER VI.

A BAKER'S DOZEN.—MADAME MOREL'S ACADEMY.—FIRST
INTRODUCTION OF MARIE MINARD.

SUPPOSE yourself to be at Plainpalais, that suburb of Geneva, the hour nine o'clock in the morning; and suppose yourself to overhear the words—

“Here we are again; thirteen Christian gentlewomen standing on one leg. It's a perfect shame!”

The speaker is Miss Scollop, an elderly daughter of Albion. Whether consciously or not, she offers a curious illustration of the impressive statement made by a Scotch writer:—“there is a fine attitude of indignation against wrong which may be assumed with the best effect.” She is leaning against a wall in a scholastic-looking apartment, and with energy increased by wrath is pulling off a boot.

Her twelve colleagues are all of them occupied as she is, all of them leaning against walls and pulling off boots—chairs being a luxury not supplied to them. That, however, in view of this circumstance, Miss Scollop should irately apostrophize them as “thirteen Christian gentlewomen standing on one leg” tickles their fancy so immensely, that with one accord they burst into a laugh; whereon the English lady, casting at them what is meant to be a withering look, marches majestically from the room.

Teaching women are much the same all the world over, and almost any group of thirteen would offer the same types. There was a time when, despite a certain spirited song about Britons, they, among Britons, as sisters and daughters of Britons, were slaves. But that belongs to the bad old times, and the world has changed since then; witness the woman teacher of the day. She is

young and clever and proud—proud with the consciousness that it is a splendid thing to be young and clever. She is very charming, albeit perhaps not perfect. (So very few mortals are.) One hears groans from certain people that she follows the fashion of wearing her hair short, has a leaning towards the unlovely in dress, and is, oh, so horribly mannish!

A pity if it be so, but hardly criminal. Spare your groans, certain people.

Marie Minard was of these. She was not of the Perfect minority; she was wondrous clever; she wore her hair short, and certain people said she tried to be mannish.

I am not aware that they ever said she succeeded.

Can you fancy five hundred and eighty-five ounces of female brain turned in the balance by fifty ounces of male? It came to this.

Of course, I regard the thirteen women forming the staff of Madame Morel's Academy as having each been gifted with one ounce more than the forty-four ounces of brain allotted, as scientists tell us, to the average female adult. A glance at the school prospectus convinces me that I am not overrating them in this. On the other hand, in the case of Monsieur la Mie, veneration for genius inclines me to make a round number of the forty-nine and a half ounces of brain which mark the average man.

For years anterior to the time at which the events which are here about to be recorded took place, it had been the fashion for the thirteen ladies forming the staff of Madame Morel's school—and I hope, by the way, that no one will be inclined to think less of said staff from its having been first introduced in the undignified attitude of standing in its entirety on one leg, as remarked

by Miss Scollop—for years past it had been the fashion for these thirteen Christian gentlewomen to be one and all in love with Monsieur la Mie; this being in words the state of affairs which, being, perhaps, a bit of a pedant, I have above indicated in figures.

That such a state of affairs should be possible seems to me to point to a very womanlike disposition in thirteen female professors. Why, then, I ask as a woman, the wail of pathos concerning the higher education of girls? Just one word in your ears, certain people: Earth's women, no matter how hard they work the forty and odd ounces of brain allotted to them by Heaven, are and ever will be, whatever their outward appearance, whatever their mannish airs, nothing more nor less than that thing you so much admire—women. There is really no need to fear they will ever turn into men.

Suppose that with me you play eavesdropper to the talk in the mistresses' room; but you must first understand that it is no longer nine o'clock in the morning.

"It is plain to me," says a sybil, strapping up a parcel of books, "that she is keeping out of his way."

"Pooh! She has hardly been three months among us yet. But—talk of an angel! Here she comes."

The "angel," the "she," was Marie Minard, who at this moment entered, singing with earth-like abandonment a song of the earth earthy—

" 'Les Portugais
Sont toujours gais,
Toujours—gais!'

How glad I am the day's work is over! Toss over my hat, please, one of you."

And having caught the said article as it winged its way through the air, and crushed it on her close-cropped

head, still singing "*Toujours gais!*" she left the room as she entered it.

We shall see her again.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTRODUCTION AND A SMILE.

"She is not fair to outward view,
As many maidens be;
Her loveliness I never knew,
Until she smiled on me."

HAD Monsieur la Mie been a poet of the Lake-Period type, these are precisely the kind of lines in which he would have immortalized his first meeting with Marie Minard. But Monsieur la Mie, though a poet, could no more have expressed a *belle pensée* in four lines of verse like these than he could have taken a walk to the top of Mont Blanc before breakfast.

Meanwhile, the meeting with Marie Minard, which has given rise to this paragraph, happened as follows:—

It was a few days before the long vacation. Marie Minard and François la Mie, who had worked at the same establishment for more than three months, were being formally introduced by Madame Morel for the first time. The latter was a painfully blonde, moon-faced woman; one of those old-time educational ladies with a chronic, vapid smile. Nature, moreover, had given to her the dimensions least compatible with dignity, making her under the medium height, while, if one may so say, over the medium breadth. Her hair, which matched her complexion—yellow, with blotches of red—was of the brilliant sheen objected to in woman by the fastidious Taine; her long projecting teeth would have made that

same complimentary writer suspect in her a daughter of England. Being in high good humour, whilst manœuvring the introduction she whinnied (some people might have called it laughing) and rubbed her hands ecstatically. Marie Minard, in acknowledgment of the proceeding, merely lifted her eyes from a pile of books and bowed. She did not smile.

Well, a girl who is not beautiful, to be passable needs to smile. So at least thought Monsieur la Mie; and for the moment he wished nothing more than to see the effect of a sparkle in the eyes of this very sedate young lady.

He was destined to have his wish fulfilled. As he was leaving the room a minute after—the thing may happen to any one, but it seems a special piece of ill luck when it happens to a man of genius, just as he is making his best bow—as he was leaving the room, which was raised above the level of the passage, Monsieur la Mie missed his footing and fell.

It was while he was picking himself up that he saw the effect of a sparkle in the eyes of the very sedate young lady. It came like a flash and went like a flash, but there it had been.

“By all that’s ridiculous, the girl is pretty,” soliloquized the unlucky Professor; while Madame Morel, with an agonized “*Mon Dieu!*” rubbed the dust from his coat with her ample pocket-handkerchief.

“Well-a-day!” you exclaim. “A man must be a true philosopher who can acknowledge the beauty lent to a face by a smile aroused by himself under circumstances like this.—Or else,” you add, “he must indeed be a Frenchman.” Monsieur la Mie was both.

When the door closed on him and Madame Morel,

the very sedate young lady laid her short-cropped head on her desk, and shook with laughter.

For shame, wicked Marie!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MISTRESSES' ROOM BEFORE BREAKING-UP.—CURIOUS
UNANIMITY OF PURPOSE.

AGAIN the thirteen Christian gentlewomen.

"Last week of term, and so much to do—so much to do! Have you made up the conduct-marks, *Gendarme?*"

The person addressed was a big young woman, with one of those faces which Nature seems to leave as dashed off in the rough; a plain, strong face, with something in it that was not beauty, but better, and more uncommon; a face essentially humorous.

"Can't you see I am busy at them?" she says, in a wondrously deep voice, which, together with a wondrously sturdy stride, not to mention a wondrous fashion of squaring her shoulders, has gained for her her nickname. "Here is a child entered three times running:

'For slamming a door.

For carving her desk.

For talking in class.'

This, my friends, is appalling—very, very appalling;" and she of the deep voice shook her head with a woe-begone look indescribably ludicrous; then, clasping her hands, fell to tapping her thumbs, a habit with Madame Morel when sorely exercised.

"Be so good, mademoiselle," said a lady with a sharp voice, "as not to hold up to ridicule what, let me tell you, is one of the finest institutions of this Academy;" and the speaker, quite out of breath, by reason of having

attempted to deliver herself of this speech minus punctuation, gasped a moment for air, then shut her lips with a snap, *more scientifico*. "The conduct-mark book is——"

"Humorous in parts, and not without its pathos here and there," the sentence was completed in a demure voice by a young woman who was bending over a pile of reports. "Don't slap me on the back, *Gendarme*; it shakes me," she added, still busily writing, and without looking up, having with fine intuition anticipated the impulse of her colleague.

That lady, who had raised her arm dramatically to administer the mark of approval thus dryly forestalled, dropped it with great good humour, and continued reading aloud from the melancholy tome of which she had the keeping.

"L. Renan, also three bad marks:

'For giggling.

For giggling.

For giggling.'

"There's a monotony about this L. Renan, isn't there?"

This with a would-be artless look of interrogation, which proved a failure, as anything in the would-be artless style must of necessity prove with *Gendarme*.

The sharp-voiced lady had some difficulty in keeping her countenance, as she looked at the rugged face and quivering lips. Still asserting herself, she said, "May I repeat my request, mademoiselle?" and closed her lips as before.

"Robert, Robert, toi que j'aime!" came an operatic cry from Marie Minard, "Robert" being the surname of the lady with the sharp voice. "Come, we all of us frankly admit you beat *Gendarme* to nothing. But listen to the advice of a friend. You'll be expelled if you

persist in thus shamelessly mimicking the fountain-head; or, worse still—this is *my* dread—it will grow to be second nature with you. We get all of us more and more like madame—we do indeed. Only the other day, I found myself melting a child to tears with a lecture on the depravity of sneezing in a scripture lesson. I somehow worked myself up. As I thought of it afterwards, it was our lady principal to a shade. ‘What would her teachers think of her?’ I began. Then, ‘What would her family think of her?’ And finally, ‘What would the WORLD think of her?’ At that the unhappy atom shrivelled up and wept. I’m sure it’s nothing to go into fit’s over, *Gendarme*.” This young woman had buried her face in her handkerchief, and rocked herself to and fro, fairly unsobered by Marie’s revelations.

“I feel it more and more, there is promotion in store for some of us,” continued the latter, pensively, as she looked away. “There are moments when I seem to see Geneva point its finger at us—‘Are there fourteen Mesdames Morel, and are these they?’ School does make humbugs of us all; that’s why I like the holidays. Where, by the way, are you others going to spend them? Robert and I are going to Les Plans.”

During the delivery of this speech Marie Minard has been standing, her figure thrown slightly back, one elbow resting in one hand, while in the other between two fingers she holds a pencil, one end of which she now puts between her teeth. Placed as she is, in the shadow of a curtain, the horrifying resemblance to a cigar is not to be denied.

Fie, Marie Minard, how mannish!

“I pause,” she adds, “for a reply,” and puffs away at her pencil.

The thrill of numbers is electric, says Professor Bain, and nothing could be more true. No immediate answer followed Marie Minard's announcement, and she might to the end of time have "paused" not only for a "reply," but for any break whatever in the complete silence which followed her surprising communication, had not the owner of a mocking voice seen fit to exclaim at last—

"*What*, Marie Minard! Going to spend your holidays at Les Plans. You don't say so?"

The speaker was a brunette, with a face that would have delighted a painter, with its refined outline, superb dark eyes, grave forehead, and smooth hair. A poet might have called her Helen; her name (oh, mothers and godmothers!) was—Mina. A poet might not have described her, even *en passant*, as mocking; the truthful writer of prose has no choice but to describe her as she was.

"I do indeed;" and Mademoiselle Minard smiled back into the bright eyes. They were especially bright this last week of term, and the dark face was flushed with long bending. Was she tired—overworked, perhaps? Passing her hand across her forehead, as if to brush away some pain, she still looked up and said gaily—

"Well, then, know, Madam Curiosity—Miss Scollop and I are going to spend our holidays, we also, at Les Plans." Having said which, she became engrossed in the contemplation of a small, inky hand.

"*What!* You don't say so," mimicked Marie Minard. "And you?" She turned to the one article of luxury supplied in the mistresses' room, a scholastic-looking sofa, on which was lying a young woman, whose sallow skin and full lips proclaimed her of non-European birth,

whence, too, her nickname—the Orientalist. Her forehead was broad, her chin square; but the small thin feet and limp hands told of weakness somewhere, as did also the strangely beautiful heavy eyes.

“I?” she said lazily. “Why, of course I am going to Les Plans, supposing I survive the fatigues of this closing week;” and she dropped a book with a suspicious yellow cover, which she had been reading, and closed her eyes.

Marie laughed as she watched her slowly dozing off; then, with French persistency, she calmly pursued her question, addressing the remaining eight ladies collectively—

“And you?”

Instead of eight answers there came one, a nondescript young woman (even in the choicest academies there are one or two nondescript young women) having taken it upon herself to answer for all; and, as even a nondescript being can rise upon occasion, so she. Gaily mounting a chair, she struck an attitude, and declaimed—

“We, that is, I and the remaining seven women of this staff, mean to spend our holidays at——”

“Perhaps one of you ladies has an English dictionary?” said a voice here at the door, as “madame” made a somewhat inopportune entrance.

Some of them had, among them the nondescript young woman, who, with commendable presence of mind, availed herself of her high position and arm dramatically extended to take it from a shelf; whereupon she handed it to her chief with that look of complete guilelessness, which is, as often as not, a notable feature in the human mouse caught at play.

“Thank you, thank you. Don’t let me disturb you, ladies; very busy, I see;” and madame, with consummate

tact, let her eye rest on the girl sleeping on the sofa, with the unmistakable "yellow-back" where she had dropped it. Then, having tucked the dictionary under her arm, the better to rub her hands, she hopped through the door held open by the nondescript young woman.

A general feeling of depression seemed to follow this unexpected visit, and for the next half-hour nothing was heard but the busy hum of pens, varied by an occasional groan as a sheet of paper was destroyed. To this renewal of industry it may perhaps be ascribed that it did not at that time transpire where the eight remaining ladies of Madame Morel's Academy, headed by the nondescript young woman, meant to spend their holidays.

CHAPTER IX.

LAUGHTER IN THE MISTRESSES' ROOM, AND A POET'S MAGNANIMITY.

It was late in the afternoon. Of the thirteen ladies before so busy in the mistresses' room only one remained—Marie Minard. Two hours passed without her raising her eyes, as book after book, paper after paper, was corrected and added to the pile beside her.

"Finished!" So saying, at last she started to her feet, then looked at her work with pardonable pride. Suddenly a change came over her face. She bent down. Yes; it stared at her in her own handwriting, with her own signature.

What had she done?

The words, which to all appearance petrified her with wonder, were merely these:

"Writing disgraceful! Copy out mistakes.—M. Minard."

It was a mild judgment compared with many passed

on other papers; but how did this paper come to be there? She looked at it again. She held it from her with a fine gesture of despair. It was an epitome of a lecture delivered in the school-hall by Monsieur la Mie, a lecture of which she had already corrected some forty epitomes. But this was in the Professor's own writing. Had she been blind? had she quite left her senses? His interjectional sentences *à la Hugo* she had expanded by means of finite verbs. She had given him two bad marks for total absence of punctuation, and had then appended the preposterous judgment:

“Writing disgraceful! Copy out mistakes.—M. Minard.”

Supposing he had seen it? It was curious to see the changes which the girl's face underwent, until at last, with the Professor's document in her hand, all alone as she was in the room, surrounded by nothing more cheerful than maps, time-tables, and physiological diagrams, prominent among them a life-size representation of the human skeleton, she burst into a laugh—not a laugh like a bell (it is people with bleeding hearts that have that laugh like a bell); this was a hearty girl's laugh, full of mischief and merriment. It shook her from head to foot, and filled the room with its sound; ran under the chairs, the table, and sofa, and behind the physiological diagrams; and then, in a burst of wild hilarity, rushed out of the room through the opened door, opened by—Monsieur la Mie.

* * * * *

Curious malice of fate! To have corrected and commented on the poet's manuscript was, when you come to think of it, an unfortunate blunder. To be caught, as was Marie Minard, with the manuscript in her hand and shaking with laughter, made the affair that combination

of the unfortunate and absurd for which language, oddly enough, has no name.

"You have the laugh on your side a second time, mademoiselle," said the poet, stiffly. "Will you let me have that paper?"

She passed it to him. The fun had suddenly vanished from her face, and for a moment something in the bend of the head and droop of the shoulders reminded one of a child in disgrace. It was only a moment; then up went the head again, but instead of a smile, the curiously solemn look came back to the dark eyes that had first made the poet see in her a very sedate young lady.

He looked at the paper, and despite himself his face relaxed.

"*Writing disgraceful! Copy out mistakes.—M. Minard,*" he read aloud; then looked at Marie, who studiously gazed into space with solemn eyes.

"I shall value this autograph more than anything I possess," he added briskly, then paused. Would she say anything? Would she apologize?

She did not. What could she say? As the question suggested itself to her, there came over her face once more, like a flash of summer lightning, the look of amusement which had on a former occasion drawn from the gentleman who called it forth the confession that she was pretty. Then the grave, far-away look came back, as she half turned away her face, unconsciously giving him the best view of her pretty antique head.

The Professor folded the paper slowly and put it into his pocket. As the girl still showed no intention of speaking, he wished her good evening. When soon after in his home, he nailed the paper over his desk.

"*Writing disgraceful,*" etc., etc.

Monsieur la Mie contemplated this document with feelings of indescribable glee. How energetically the corrections had been made; how dashing was the signature; and how the girl had laughed! Then—he saw it still—the bend of her neck, the droop of her shoulders, the flash of summer lightning in her eyes; and, last and best, the three-quarter view of the pretty antique head!

“Supposing I married her?”

The Professor took out his note-book, and, with the picture fresh in his mind, penned on an unsullied page the name “Ramie Mardin,” in which the reader acquainted with the delicate turn of the Frenchman’s mind, will easily recognize a veiled version of “Marie Minard.”

“A pity our mothers should be at variance!” he muttered. “And yet, no.” He smiled.—It gave the thing a piquancy.

CHAPTER X.

EUGÉNIE ROLAND.

I CAN think of no words that better describe Eugénie Roland, the girl of all others whom Madame la Mie wished her son to marry, for motives which the reader will easily divine, than those put by old Richardson into the lips of that choice gentleman, Mr. Lovelace, in face of Lady Betty—“Pretty well, but a little too frolicky that air.”

“You don’t mean to say that we are going to that primitive nest Les Plans again this year, Eugénie?” said Madame Roland.

“*I* am,” was the answer.

The speaker was a young person, aged nineteen, who was rocking herself on the arm of a chair, and was as

bewitchingly, vacantly pretty as those young persons the pictures of whom have from time immemorial made of scent-boxes things of beauty. "*I am.*" Having thus briefly replied, she bent her head, and was for a moment beautiful, with something better than the scent-box beauty—with the beauty of perfect features, perfect colouring, and long, fair lashes.

The woman before her was her mother, and the face before her was her own face as it would be after thirty years. An elaborately hideous face, a famous writer would have called the older one; and the face of the girl might perhaps have been called elaborately lovely.

"Anything more to say, mother?" she said pertly. She had thrown herself into the chair, and laid her arms along *its* arms. As she spoke she tapped her hands up and down from the wrist, so that nothing was wanting to complete the insolence of her manner.

Madame Roland looked at her. "No—yes. Listen to me, my angel." Here she stooped forward. She was not a woman with whom love was, generally, an explosive emotion; but when this pretty daughter of hers was peculiarly insolent, it was her custom to wax endearing.

Eugénie started to her feet. "What do you kiss me for? Understand once for all, I *will* not be kissed by you."

"Why not?"

"Because"—again she had thrown herself into her chair. She looked straight into her mother's face as she answered—"because—— Well, the fact is, I don't like you."

"You don't—like me?" Woman of the world though she was, Madame Roland turned a shade paler at this curiously frank announcement from her only child.

"I don't dislike you," the girl modified her statement, half sitting forward, and rather wincing at her mother's pale face, "but," gaining courage as she went on, "I like other people, other things, better; and I *won't* have you kiss me. You weary me."

For an individual aged nineteen, and with a face suggestive of no great originality, all this was strange enough. Face to face with her mother, she had explained her feelings as clearly as it was possible to explain them. She liked other people, *other things*, better.

"After all, what I chiefly meant to say is, that *I* am going to Les Plans," she concluded, and passed into an adjoining room.

"You here already, monsieur?"

The Professor bowed. "I have been waiting ten minutes."

"Have you?" with a little laugh that came from her head, that curled her straight lips and showed her cruel teeth—glittering teeth, growing smaller and smaller towards the front, like a cat's. "Then, you have been playing eavesdropper. Nay"—the Professor described that wave of the hand with which a Frenchman indicates what Mrs. Cluppins put into words at the Pickwick trial—"pray don't think I care. Only spare me to-day with lessons, and let us talk. How I do hate books! I suppose I am very stupid, monsieur. Why was I born without brains?"

She had seated herself; and, leaning forward with her head on one hand, had unconsciously pushed back the hair that fell thick on her narrow brow. The hand and arm were perfect, but the brow, which was "villainous low," spoiled for Monsieur la Mie's fastidious taste the beauty of the face.

She repeated her question: "Why was I born without brains?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That is no answer," objected Eugénie. Then, with a flash from beneath the golden lashes, she added, with incredible coquetry, "You cannot endure brainless women, can you?"

Again a shrug, and again a remonstrance.

"*Allez*; that is no answer."

"Do you want me to answer you, Mademoiselle Roland?"

This man of many emotions could speak in a tone that was cold as ice.

The golden lashes sank, as Eugénie said, "Yes."

"Well, I certainly do not like brainless women. To tell you the truth, mademoiselle, 'I like other people, *other things*, better.'"

How white she turned!

The Professor still gazed at her. Do as his mother wished, and make this girl the recipient of his lifelong devotion. (It was curious, by the way, with what ease this changeful being pictured himself making a woman the recipient of lifelong devotion.) No, no, Lady Betty; "*pretty well, but a little too frolicky that air.*"

As these thoughts, or thoughts similar, crossed his mind, Madame Roland rustled into the room, and took her wonted seat on the sofa.

Some hour later, on Monsieur la Mie's leaving the house, a girl with a white drawn face watched him from the window. It was Eugénie Roland. A week later, she and her mother betook themselves to "that primitive nest"—Les Plans.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PENSION EDELWEISS AND ITS PROPRIETRESS.

NEED it be said that Monsieur la Mie had announced his intention of spending his holidays at Les Plans.

He had written a letter to this effect to Frau Metzle, the proprietress of the Pension Edelweiss. It was the first intimation that lady had received of a visitor, and, as was her custom, she read the letter aloud, with parenthetical remarks.

“‘*Expect me*’ [Heaven be praised!]” said Frau Metzle, devoutly] “‘*and two ladies*’ [that, I’ll be bound, is his mother and Mamselle Winkelried] *on Monday.*”

“Monday! why, that’s the day after to-morrow. Do you hear, Babette? Twenty beds to be got ready by Monday, the day after to-morrow.”

Babette was Frau Metzle’s handmaid. Big, wondering eyes she had at all times; when opened, as now, in special surprise, they were a sight to see.

“Twenty beds! for one gentleman and his two ladies!”

“Mercy on us, Babette! You’re as stupid as you’re fat!” exclaimed Frau Metzle, indignantly. “One gentleman and his two ladies! One would think you were born yesterday. It’s one gentleman and his *twenty* ladies—his mother and the mamselle, and half the dem’iselles from the pennsione Morel, and Mamselle Roland, to mention no more. With your two ladies, indeed!” And Frau Metzle cast a withering look at her handmaid, who during this speech had stood with her bare, red arms pendent, with parted lips, and with eyes, if possible, more wide open than ever.

Frau Metzle was of Stuttgart. Her mother, Frau

Spätzle, had been lady's-maid to a lady-in-waiting on the queen, who holds her residence in that capital, and mine hostess of the Pension Edelweiss had been brought up, she was wont to say, in court air. In Stuttgart, till the age of twenty-nine, she had remained a spinster, living what you might call a genteel life in the houses of divers of the nobility of that city. Here she had held the function of "Mamsell," a title which, given to working housekeepers in Germany, curiously exemplifies the courtesy of nations, and especially the amiable tendency between border-nations, each to make use of a word borrowed from the language of the other, when desirous of conveying an idea of disparagement. A great French linguist has told us that *hablador*, which in Spanish means "a speaker," becomes in French *hableur*, "a braggart;" while "ce qui est piquant," he adds, *parleur*, which in French denotes "a speaker," becomes in Spanish *parlador*, "a braggart." Very "piquant" indeed. Not quite so piquant, perhaps, but as falling not far short of it, I consider the fact that "mademoiselle," which, as all the world knows, is the form of addressing an unmarried gentlewoman in France, becomes in Germany "mamsell," the name given to that one member of a household who, whilst not exactly a menial, is also not acknowledged to be on an equality with "the family."

To return to Frau Metzle. In speaking of the portion of her career spent as "mamsell" in Germany, this worthy was wont to lay stress on the fact that she had—Heaven be praised!—seldom demeaned herself by acting as housekeeper for less than a countess, and had drawn the line at baronesses. When she was twenty-nine—at which age a spinster in Germany, more especially in Suabia, commonly turns strong-minded—Herr

Metzle, of Geneva, crossed her path, and here let Frau Metzle speak for herself.

"What he married me for, I can't imagine. He got neither beauty nor fortune, that's certain. I suppose the Evil One put it into his head, poor fellow. Well, I led him a life of it while I had him, which wasn't for long; for we were barely married a month when he took a fever. I watched by him, and nursed him; all no good—for he died in next to no time; and the Lord knows I was thankful."

This curious *finale* caused a shock of surprise to most of Frau Metzle's auditors; but that dame was nothing if not original.

As a widow she had left Stuttgart for Les Plans sur Bex, and there, with her mother, Frau Spätzle, had undertaken to carry on the Pension Edelweiss, left without a manager by the death, about the same time, of its owner, the father of the not-lamented Metzle.

The Christian name of Frau Metzle was Bertha; as pronounced by her mother in the Suabian manner "Bairdah." She was a tall, dark woman, with a "widow's peak," and a deep "two-husbands frown," with eyes of the horse description—large, still, and having the axis of vision so inclined as to give you the idea that she saw what went on sideways. Add a nose of imposing dimensions, and a protruding nether lip. Add a Dutch figure, and array it in black alpaca, of make severely simple; the sole trimming, bands of beaded braid, arranged with strict regard to symmetry. Add immaculate linen cuffs and ditto collar, both highly starched, and rather highly "blued," both fastened with black ornaments; add very large felt boots, guiltless of heels and beautifully square; add an elaborate head-dress giving

the impression of a paucity of hair, but of infinite resources in black tape and cotton velvet. To complete the picture, add the expression peculiar to ladies of the boarding-house profession, more especially such as have made their apprenticeship to it in the ladies'-maid capacity—a something, not only in the eyes, but in the carriage of the neck and of the nose, for which there is, I believe, no name, but which if you have never noticed, you are not, and never were, a traveller.

On this particular day Frau Metzle was in high good humour. “You may let my mother know,” she said to Babette, “that M’s’yay la Mie is coming to us; and if you want to chatter the news all over the place, do so and relieve your mind. I won’t say but it might do good to let them know at the Rose des Alpes”—with a sarcastic look at the opposite house—“that M’s’yay la Mie is not going to them, with their new green shutters—bah!” And Frau Metzle, to whom the new green shutters at the Rose des Alpes had been a thorn in the flesh for the last week, turned on them a gaze in which disgust and pity were finely blended; then gently pushed Babette out of the kitchen, repeating that she had better relieve her mind and chatter the news all over the place; which Babette did.

And now, if you please, back to Geneva.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STEAMER TO VILLENEUVE, AND A LOOK BACK AT GENEVA.

THERE are in the world two things unparalleled, it has been said—the Beautiful at the Lake of Geneva, the Sublime at the Lake of Lucerne.

It might with equal truth be said that at Geneva and

Lucerne is illustrated the most potent way of *marring* the Beautiful and the Sublime; which is, to oppose to them the Convenient. Who can think without shuddering of that row of hotels placed on the northern bank of Lake Lemman in face of Mont Blanc; whose eye is not offended at sight of the little steamers that all day long puff up and down the lake?

Suppose yourself to be a prosaic nineteenth-century tourist. Having from the windows of one of those same hotels "done" Mont Blanc, you may as well take a look at the steamer *Helvétique* as it paddles up to the quay. Or you may as well set out with me as passenger on its next trip. A steamer the size of a nutshell, in an ocean the size of a tea-bowl; but oh, the excitement! The man at the wheel tries to look the very embodiment of a wise old salt; the captain struts till he is purple in the face; the sailors smoke, like real tars; and, to judge from the puffing and panting, as the Lilliputian vessel approaches the quay, from the gurgling and gasping, the whizzing and wheezing and whistling, the throwing of ropes, the rushing hither and thither, the hurry on board and the flurry on land, you would deem at the very least that this trim little steamboat *Helvétique* had returned from a voyage round the globe. What a waving of handkerchief and of hats, what kissing of hands and exchanging of glances; on landing, what hugging and smuggling! Make haste; make haste! We are off again. Up with the plank! Whir-r-r-r-r! Whiz-z-z-z-z! Gully! gully! gully! Good-bye! Yo-ho! In with the ropes! Whir-r-r-r-r! Whiz-z-z-z-z! Gully! gully! gully!

Stop! Where are we going? Are we off to the Antipodes! No, no! But we are going the whole length of Lake Lemman to Villeneuve.

Whir-r-r-r-r! Whiz-z-z-z-z!

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Look back! To westward old Geneva stretches beyond the bridge; the fine old city of preachers, of watchmakers, and of musical-box makers. Here there is also an institute in which may be learnt the handling of the musical-box called piano. And, grandest sight of all, overlooking the musical-box shops, and the musical-box school, and the jewellery shops, and the churches, and the public promenade called English Garden, and the river, and the lake, and us whizzing along the river towards the lake: overlooking the quaint narrow streets and the high old houses—unfinished towers of Babel, topped with impudent chimney-pots: overlooking the curious old town hall, with its Florentine front; and the Musée Rath, in which may be seen the art-products of the countrymen of Calame; and the arsenal, where are kept the trophies won by Helvetia in the brave days of old; and the library, founded by unhappy Bonnivard; and the washer-women beside the Rhone; and the boys in the streets, crying the whole day long "*La Tribune!*" (with wondrous emphasis on the *La*), and the youths and men shouting from dawn to dark, "*Vitres! Vitres!*" (the good Genevese must be of the people who live in houses of glass, for the cry of "*Window-panes!*" never ceases among them); and those wonderful moving tents called "*diligences*," leaning towers of canvas, the last of which survive in Geneva (a treasure in store for the Musée Rath), there reeling and rumbling adown the streets, doing their very best to keep up with the steam-tramway, and looking in the attempt as drearily comic as might look Rip van Winkle or Robinson Crusoe, bustling down the Rue de la Croix d'Or on the arm of Monsieur la

Mie:—overlooking all this and more, with the expression of stony gravity which I believe you and I would find depicted on our own faces, did we keep them turned in one direction for a thousand years or so; overlooking all this, itself a strange combination of incongruities, behold the Gothic edifice surrounded by Greek columns, the cathedral of Geneva, with its three towers! Look at it well, and beneath it the grand old city, the city of Calvin, the Protestant Rome. And after the city, look at the surroundings: the river, the mountains, the lake. Never mind what Goethe, never mind what Michelet, said. Only look! You surely must think, you surely must feel something. There is inspiration in the beautiful. Only look! In face of these Alps, Voltaire wrote, not a satire, not rhymed blasphemy, but a poem; on the bank of this lake Rousseau wrote his “Confessions;” and here—— But alas! alas! I who speak to you am a woman, and my heart flutters and language fails as these thoughts crowd on me.

Farewell to the grand old city. We are passing the piers that divide the lake from the river. We are on our way to Villeneuve, and with us are Monsieur la Mie, his mother, and Margaret Winkelried.

CHAPTER XIII.

PASSING THE PIERS.—WHAT THE GERMANS CALL “GEMÜTH.”

WE are passing the piers, strange little piers, with a lighthouse on each. Behind one of the lighthouses, on a narrow ledge, is a girl. Half child, half woman, she stands with her face towards the steamer. She is fair, with grey eyes and soft features—she wears a red cap. She is laughing, and shades her eyes with one hand as

she leans on the lighthouse. The figure and pose are bewitching, and the shade thrown over the laughing eyes completes the picture. Her name is Lady Peggy. She is English.

A low, gurgling sound; the steamer has passed, and the water roused by it rushes back to the pier with a splash and a roar, then sends a shower of silver drops over feet and face of the girl. How nice!

The sun is on the lake and streaming over the mountains. How beautiful!

Suddenly the water calms. With the drops on her feet and face, the girl leaves her post at the back of the lighthouse.

At the same moment an eye-glass is lowered with an aggrieved gesture by a gentleman on board the *Helvétique*. To him this is an unaccountable freak on the part of Dame Nature to let mountain and river and lake abide for all time, while of her fairest product she should give but fleeting glances. The sky and the lake and the mountain, these stand as they stood two minutes before, and will probably stand two minutes hence; as they have stood from the beginning of time, and will probably stand to the end of time: but the fairest thing in the landscape, the girl, half child, half woman, with the sun on her laughing lips, and her eyes laughing out of the shade, where is she?

Strange and odious caprice of Dame Nature's that she alone should vanish, whilst, lost in contemplation of the particular speck in the landscape occupied by her, stands a gentleman on board the *Helvétique*, aiding naked vision by means of an eye-glass.

Ere yet the frown had vanished from the brow of Monsieur la Mie, he suddenly felt himself the object of

earnest contemplation. In another instant his eyes met those of German Margaret. Odd that it should not before have struck him! Looking into Margaret Winkelried's eyes is like looking into the lake. Such must have been the eyes of the *Lorelei*—so deep, so blue.

This is a thought which flashes upon the Professor exactly two minutes after experiencing that pang of vexation that a certain English face—the face of Lady Peggy—should not be a fixture to the back of a lighthouse. Forgetful of all else, he now could fall upon his knees before the German. Not that he does so. Even a man of genius cannot so fly in the face of custom as to fall at the feet of a lady on board a tourists' steamer in the broad daylight.

And the German? As Monsieur la Mie leaves her and betakes himself to the other end of the deck, Margaret, leaning over the steamer's edge, with her blue eyes fixed on the blue waters, says, "Ach!"

Now, what the Germans call *Gemüth* I believe to be nothing more nor less than this faculty of saying "Ach."

Leaning yet lower over the steamer's edge, dipping yet deeper her blue eyes into the blue waters the speaker rather breathes than adds aloud, "Mein Franz!"

And the steamer paddles on, curling the water before it, leaving a silver track behind it and cradling the boats that near it. And, caught by the wheel, the waters within the circle of the wheel, rising in white foam, fall back in silver drops; and beyond the wheel and beyond the foam, where a pair of blue eyes look into the blue water, there also fall silver drops.

All this is what the Germans call *Gemüth*.

CHAPTER XIV.

PASSING CHILLON.

THAT the last chapter ended as it did, in tears, was the result of our having had a German on board our steamer. Be it understood that she has now ceased weeping. Wise and bewitching maiden! She looks as fresh as the flower, her namesake, after a shower, and is smiling at that fickle François la Mie in a manner that causes his mother to furrow her brow and purse her lips, as, in an alpaca coat of the *cher défunt*, she strides up and down the deck, with her coat-tails flapping behind her.

Did she see those passing tears? Did she hear that "*Ach . . . mein Franz*"?

Up and down go the coat-tails; up and down goes she. And just put yourself in her place. Is not this German a most deplorably pretty girl? Only look at her—at the dainty oval of her face, the dash of crimson in her cheeks and lips, the sun on her forehead, the light on her hair, and the smile all over her.

Parbleu! a mother is a mother. Madame la Mie can remain a silent spectator no longer. Walking up to Fräulein Winkelried, she resolves to engage that young person in a conversation with herself, thus to remove from her side *mon fils*.

She has hit on an excellent way. It has been observed ere this by those wise in their generation, that a gentleman somehow seldom appears to find the same charm in the company of a lady when a mutual friend draws nigh; and that, similarly, a lady is observed to grow monosyllabic in conversing with a gentleman when another of the human species approaches. The problems in social life are great and many. The only elucidation

of the present one which I can offer is that contained in the arithmetical platitude, "two and one makes three," by the help of which small phrase one seems to see, as through a glass darkly, the meaning of this thing.

As Madame la Mie draws nearer to Margaret Winkelried, Monsieur la Mie draws further away; and against Madame la Mie has seated herself beside Margaret, not to say upon Margaret—for the seat where sits the maiden is small, and the dimensions of madame are large—against this feat has taken place, behold Monsieur la Mie at the furthest end of the steamer, leaning against a railing in a disconsolate albeit graceful attitude. Then with a smile Madame la Mie turns to Margaret—

"Do you admire the view?"

Any one who has read the works of Lewis Carroll will remember a poem of his describing a walk along a beach undertaken by a walrus and a carpenter, escorted by some oysters. He will also recollect that this was the very question put by the walrus to the oysters when he was about to gobble them—

"Do you admire the view?"

Poor Margaret did not answer, and looked as like an oyster as mortal maiden could. Meanwhile Madame la Mie, having felt on which side was the hem, used her handkerchief loudly and exultantly; then mopped her face and neck with it, the heat being great. Margaret looked at her, and a thought crossed her brain.

"Pardon me," she said meekly; "you are sitting on my dress. Thank you"—extricating herself, as madame rose some inch or so. "Why, here we are in face of Chillon!"

As she said this, the girl looked about her, smiling; and then—then actually ran straight along the deck, with only one glance over her shoulder at Madame la Mie.

"I *do* admire the view. Monsieur la Mie must tell me all about Chillon."

Positively, yes. Could defiance further go? In almost the same instant she stood beside the Professor, clasping her hands, as only a German can, while, with eyes raised to Chillon, she said—

"Please, tell me all about it."

He should, of course, have looked at Chillon, as she did; but he did not. He looked at her; at the soft profile clear against the sky; at the tilted chin, as she looked upward; at the play of colour in the face, the stray hairs fluttering in the breeze.

"Angel!" he murmured. "What if I married her?"

Then he told her all about it.

CHAPTER XV.

VILLENEUVE FISHERFOLK.—FIRST APPEARANCE OF MONSIEUR MEUNIER AND MONSIEUR MEUNIER'S HORSE.—MADAME LA MIE ON A CART-WHEEL.

MADAME LA MIE was corpulent; corpulent people are subject to apoplexy; apoplectic people are apt to turn purple in the face; and people who turn purple in the face are given to panting. So she. Entirely unprepared as she was for the tide which affairs had taken, this good lady first fell to panting; then she turned purple in the face; and finally seemed on the very verge of a fit—the feeling uppermost in her bosom as she gazed at *mon fils* with Margaret at his side being one of horror, not to say sickness, blended with a miserable sense of her own fatness and incapacity to cope with slippery maidenhood.

Thus the party passed Chillon; and, hard though it

is to resist the temptation to indulge in some landscape-painting here, let us shut our eyes and hasten onward. At Villeneuve we reach the extremity of the lake; at Villeneuve we will take a last look round.

You observe, as we land, three blue-nosed fisherfolk, a man, a youth, and a boy. They have been fishing for the last three hours. Not that any one has timed them, or that any one noticed when they set out. Their noses show it. Given ordinary weather, fresh, not biting, you can say to a nicety how long any man, youth, or boy has been fishing by the colour of his nose. This observation I made when, some years ago, during a sojourn on Lake Lemman, I gave to the matter of angling attentive study. "After one hour's fishing," I remarked, and jotted it down at the time, "the human nose turns bright red; after two hours, crimson; blue, after three."

The habit of jotting down noteworthy facts is one which, I confess, I have imitated from Monsieur la Mie. Being scrupulous to a degree as to anything to be set down in black on white for public perusal, I will frankly admit that I found it impossible to discover to a nicety, by the colour of a man's nose, how long he had fished over and above the three hours indicated by blue. I submit, however, that when the colour fluctuates between deep blue and black, it is safe to conclude that the fishing process has been going on for something like six hours. At this point an angler on Lake Lemman usually puts up his rod, consigns a pocket-handkerchiefful of Lilliputian fish to his hat, calmly replaces that article on his head, and then walks home in the state of beatific self-content which comes to him who feels that, unlike a certain emperor, he has not lost a day.

And here a discovery. We have stayed so long gazing

at the blue-nosed fisherfolk of Villeneuve that, if we want to reach Les Plans ere nightfall, we must make a rush for the station to catch the next train to Bex.

"Ah! steamer and train; train and steamer, that is the way you travel through Switzerland," says some one. Not quite; for neither train nor steamer will take us from Bex to Les Plans.

Suppose us, then, to have reached Bex. Up rolls a coachman. He wears no livery, and he carries no whip; but the roll is sufficient to betray him. A remarkable-looking individual, this. He seems all hair. It grows low on his forehead and low on his neck; it covers him from the crown of his head to the point of his chin; it bristles in beard, whiskers, moustache, in beetling eyebrows and short, thick eyelashes. His face is all but completely hidden; for, excepting the nose, a strip of forehead, and patch of cheek, nothing of the human divine remains visible.

"You the gentleman for the pension Edelweiss?" he says, looking knowingly at Monsieur la Mie.

Why coachmen always look knowing is a mystery which I have never been able to solve. They always do; and even when they blunder, carry it off with a twinkle that says, "Mind you, I knew I was blundering," which is in itself a triumph of knowingness.

Monsieur la Mie nods.

"And these, I suppose, your ladies?" with another twinkle and a jerk of the thumb in the direction of madame and Margaret.

"Right again." Monsieur la Mie smiles.

"Good. Have the kindness to step this way;" and the knowing gentleman takes the lead.

"*That's my horse.*"

We have all of us heard of the Roman mother who, pointing to her sons, said, "These are my jewels." Much as I dislike pompous comparisons in a general way, I cannot help thinking that the tone in which Monsieur Meunier said, "That's my horse," will be described most fitly by stating it to have been identical with that which is popularly considered to have been the tone of the Roman mother. On the other hand, just as there are jewels and jewels, so there are horses and horses, and perhaps the only trait that can be said to be shared by the latter in common is that set in the well-known juvenile's description, "four legs, one at each corner." At least, this applies to Monsieur Meunier's horse, which, excepting in this particular, resembled none of its species.

Monsieur la Mie looked at it; so likewise did Madame la Mie, and Margaret. None of them spoke.

"My horse," repeated Monsieur Meunier, not querulously, nor as if hurt by the silence with which his first announcement of this fact had met; but simply as a man will repeat any statement that conveys a truth pleasing to himself, and which, even if it do not call forth spoken comment from you, cannot fail, he tells himself, to impress you. "This way, ladies," with another roll and a twinkle—a twinkle meaning absolutely nothing but immense knowingness and boundless complaisance.

What has been called the flash of identity in the midst of difference, was at this moment curiously illustrated in the faces of Madame la Mie, Monsieur la Mie, and Margaret Winkelried. Despite all the difference of outline, the expression on their three faces was for the moment identical—an expression of horror so unmitigated as to be of that kind which exactly trembles in the

balance between the indescribably pathetic and unutterably ludicrous.

Then, with another flash of identity, they one and all gasped the question—

“*That*—your horse?”

It was one of those questions to which no answer is expected, and Monsieur Meunier accordingly gave none, beyond another twinkle.

“Supposing we count—one, two, three! and make for it,” quoth Margaret, suddenly recovering herself. Then, counting as she had said, she made a run for the vehicle, and climbed into it over the wheel—an act which caused Madame la Mie to clasp her hands and shut her eyes, and Monsieur la Mie to clasp his hands and keep his eyes open; it being a fact known to every one who knows anything that the sight of a pretty girl with her hat half off, scrambling over a wheel into a cart, even at the mad risk of showing an inch of white stocking, however it scandalize an elderly lady, is a thing which has caused no lady’s son ever since the world began to experience feelings of horror—always excepting John Knox. I fancy John Knox would not have survived the spectacle.

“If you have not forgotten her very existence, François, be good enough to help y-o-u-r m-o-t-h-e-r,” said madame, freezingly; upon which Monsieur la Mie led her gallantly to the vehicle. The lady, with infinite dignity, posed her right foot on one spoke, then requested her son to give her a gentle push, which that dutiful individual did, cheered on by Monsieur Meunier, who watched the stout lady’s ascent with a pleased expression, and encouraged her on her way with a well-meant but not altogether happily chosen or kindly received “*Up* she goes!” Thus

Madame la Mie reached the axle. Then came a difficulty. Planting her foot here, the stout lady invoked heaven and earth to witness that move another step up or down she would not.

CHAPTER XVI.

STARTED.—A DRIVE UPHILL, AND ARRIVAL AT THE EDELWEISS.

"CLIMB into the vehicle, mother," besought the poet. Madame la Mie said nothing.

"Get down again, then."

Madame la Mie said nothing. Planting her foot still more firmly, she looked straight before her with a stony gaze. Margaret Winkelried stopped in the middle of a smile; the poet scowled; Monsieur Meunier alone still twinkled. A woman might be stubborn, he said to himself—and Madame la Mie looked about as stubborn as man or woman could look—but no human being since the world began ever spent his life on a cart-wheel; so that, if Madame la Mie did not move up, despite her own statement to the contrary, it was plain to him that she would move down. Accordingly, while Monsieur la Mie looked thunderous and Margaret Winkelried perplexed, Monsieur Meunier troubled himself not an instant concerning the situation, but cocked his head on one side, put his hands in his pockets, and, as has been said, continued twinkling.

When, however, five minutes passed, and the stout lady still made no sign of movement, he swung himself on the driver's seat and took the reins in his hands.

"MONSTER!"

"Why, lady, did you think I was going to risk your life and drive-off?" said the arch-hypocrite, turning with

well-feigned amazement to the matron, who had reached the ground with one leap. "Now, if you would not mind sharing this seat with me, I think you might mount here more easily."

Oh, wily charioteer! Madame la Mie took the bait, and in another instant was beside Monsieur Meunier.

"And my son?"

"In the waggon—with Mamselle." This with a twinkle of extra-waggishness, but which was stopped half-way, being, so to speak, blighted by the gaze which it met with from Madame la Mie. Here be it said, there are few sights more curious than that of a blighted twinkle. The human eye is at all times interesting, but it is under aspects like this that it becomes a fascinating study.

As he met the gaze of Madame la Mie and felt its annihilating effect on the sparkle in his own eye, it burst upon Monsieur Meunier that, for once in his life, he had made a grand mistake. "Madame" did *not* countenance the attachment which seemed to exist between the couple behind.

Being, with all his knowingness, unable to think of a neat way out of the dilemma into which he had got himself, Monsieur Meunier cut further complications short by giving his whip a resounding crack.

And so they started, Madame la Mie rocking herself to and fro as she groaned, "Heavens! my good man, what will become of us?"

Monsieur Meunier answered not, as himself he rather anxiously contemplated "my horse."

Here another word on horses. Whether Pegasus be its name, or Rosinante, the animal that shares with the human species the peculiarity of wearing shoes, with the non-beribboned thereof a confessed weakness for liquor

stronger than water, and with the fat boy in Pickwick the capacity for falling asleep standing, has ever seemed to me the most interesting of quadrupeds. I will confess I never rode on horseback, and do not keep a carriage, but I take a hansom occasionally just to watch at my leisure the tricks and manners of the horse. I have studied the subject, and know that the usual equine paces are four—walking, trotting, galloping, and ambling; these, after all, the paces most in vogue with human beings also.

As for Monsieur Meunier's horse Ami, it fell in with none of these known and approved methods of "going." In all of them the animal leads off with one or two feet at once. Ami led off with all four. From this style he relapsed into a *potpourri* of various paces combined, and thus carried Madame la Mie and her party out of Bex up the ascent leading to Les Plans. Any one who has travelled in Switzerland will know that, be the path leading along the precipice wide as it may, the horse and carriage chosen by him invariably keep to the extreme outer edge, and though he may have a three yards' margin on the safe side of him, from the abyss he is barely separated by a foot. This, no doubt, belongs to the law of gravitation, and a Newton would submit to it without complaint. Normal beings of the male sex, to whom the thing is novel, fume and remonstrate; normal beings of the female sex, who are on their first Swiss tour, wail and give themselves up for lost; all of which the Swiss driver views with the calmness which is born of habit. So Monsieur Meunier, when Ami finally set off up the hills on the way to Les Plans, keeping within one foot of the steep slope skirting the road, and leading, as seemed to Margaret Winkelried, to bottomless perdi-

tion. The German maiden had but half regained repose, when the animal, some way up the hill, suddenly stood stock still, with what appeared to be an intention similar to, if not identical with, that announced by Madame la Mie some time before, and with that look in his eye of which the author of "Table Talk" has said: "We all of us, I believe, have noticed the look in a horse's eye just before he is going to bite or kick, but will any one, therefore, describe to me exactly what that look is?"

It seems presumptuous to accept the challenge of so eloquent a writer, but since he puts the question I cannot forego offering my mite of observation. It strikes me that "that look" is nothing more nor less than one in which we get an equine combination of the vindictiveness of Becky Sharp and the touch-me-notishness of the maiden aunt in Pickwick.

"Better dismount," said Monsieur Meunier, with one of his inexpressibly knowing gazes, which said as plain as words, "I knew it would come to this." Considering it had come to this without exception on every occasion on which Monsieur Meunier and his horse had fetched the tourists from Bex to Les Plans, there was certainly no very special astuteness in his knowing that it would come to this on the present occasion. But let that pass. As soon as the twinkle at what he deemed his own superlative cleverness had somewhat subsided, he confided to the party that Ami had indeed one whimsical trait, and that was, that he could not abide strangers, but would carry him, Jacques Meunier, like a lamb. In illustration of which statement, the three tourists having dismounted quickly, as advised by him some moment before, he settled himself in his seat, gave Ami a gentle tap, and so drove on, followed on foot by the poet and the two

ladies, the three of them looking about as blank as it is possible for three mortals to look—which is saying much, for really the capacities of the human physiognomy in this direction are amazing.

Only once did Monsieur Meunier address them during the drive, and that was after they had toiled uphill behind him for some half-hour. Then he said, giving Ami another tap, "Curious, isn't it, now, how quietly he drives me? Can't endure strangers, somehow. Was always the same."

To affirm that the trio smiled a sickly smile would be to give them credit for more sense of the humorous than at this turn of affairs they really seemed to possess.

So this curious feature in Ami was nothing new. That Monsieur Meunier should boast of that was natural. Most people seem to think that to have "always" had some glaring fault lends a splendour to the thing—a curious line of argument, it must be admitted; rather a fine one, possibly, if one could follow it.

Having made the said impressive statement, Monsieur Meunier seemed to deem that further parley would be waste of time, and, again tapping the animal, continued on his way. That you can surprise human beings into anything was illustrated by the tourists. There was something so unutterably astonishing in their situation, in the calm air with which Jaques Meunier monopolized the carriage, that the effect it had on them was that which conduct like this always has—the first shock of amazement being over, their mental faculties were so benumbed that they accepted the state of affairs as if getting the worth of one's money were an exploded fiction, and the most natural thing in the world that people who had set

out on a trip on the system of "carriage prepaid" should, instead of being driven, tramp behind their driver. In this way the party arrived at last within sight of the few cottages of which Les Plans is composed. With their boarding-house distant from them some fifty steps, Monsieur Meunier informed them that if they would now like to drive, the road being even, he could guarantee that Ami would be steady. The invitation was humorously accepted by the Professor and Margaret Winkelried. Madame La Mie declined with satirical thanks. She had reason to rejoice in having done so, for as the vehicle approached the courtyard of the Pension Edelweiss, through the gloaming were seen to be shining various articles of undergear. They were swollen to dropsical dimensions, after the manner of apparel thus exposed, and, as they floated in the breeze, looking ready at any moment to wing balloon-like into upper air, Ami was seized with the playful fancy to rise on his hind legs, in carrying out which whim he deposited the Professor and Margaret so unceremoniously at the gate of the Pension Edelweiss, that the next sight which met the small beady eyes of mine hostess of the Rose des Alpes, as she applied them to a crevice in the objectionable green shutters of her establishment, was the entry into the rival inn of the Professor, followed by his mother, and carrying in his arms a very pretty, very pale, unconscious girl.

So much for a journey in Switzerland not by steamer and not by train.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARGARET'S ILLNESS, REVELATIONS, RECOVERY, AND THE
ECCENTRIC CAPTAIN.

ON regaining her senses, Margaret's first words were a cry, "Franz! Franz!" Then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears.

The Professor stood at the head of the sofa. He was not a stick nor a stone, and had his mother not been between them, he would have knelt beside this lovely girl, and told her all that a man can tell a woman to convince her of that fact.

But his mother was between them; and, what was more, Margaret was in no condition to understand an announcement of the sort; for, in moving her foot, the thrill of pain caused her to faint anew.

"A sprain or bone broken," said Madame la Mie, gruffly; then, with a gentle touch, wheeled the girl to an open window. Gruff women, oddly enough, often make tender nurses, and with not a few Xantippes life would be quite endurable, could one keep up a series of bodily ailments.

"Fetch a doctor," added Madame la Mie, turning to her son, who, poet-like, stood in the centre of the room, a picture of helpless but interesting distress, his hand dramatically raised to his brow. "I must have her taken to bed;" and Madame la Mie pushed back the hair which lay on the girl's forehead, adding under her breath, "*Pauvre petite!*"

The Professor went to do her bidding, and against he returned Margaret was lying in a darkened bedroom. The doctor loudly regretted that he had not been called in sooner, of which lamentation no one took any notice,

because, as all the world knows, it is one invariably set up by medical gentlemen in small places. Thereupon he tortured the foot as much as possible; then shook his head at the flushed face and sparkling eyes of his patient. Finally, having done some fair work with oil and bandages, leaving a long prescription with directions still longer, he took his hat from under his chair and bowed himself out of the room; but not till he had promised in a mysterious whisper to call again at his very earliest "possible." The whole conversation prior to this he had conducted in the first person plural. "And how did our little friend come to sprain our little foot?" etc., a style which requires some skill in the handling, and which, to their praise be it said, rural medical gentlemen have, by unanimous consent, the credit of carrying to a high point of perfection. Most curious was it to watch the expression on Madame la Mie's face when the doctor had discoursed for some ten minutes without once slipping into the first person singular; equally curious to follow the thoughts portrayed on the mobile features of the poet, as in the same style, with a glance towards Margaret's door, the doctor favoured him with an oracular *résumé* of "our impressions," then, in parting, held out two dumpy fingers, in acknowledgment of which the poet humorously extended two slender ones.

Meanwhile, Margaret was holding tight in hers the hand of Madame la Mie, and was addressing to that lady a rambling discourse in her native tongue as "*lieber Franz*," in the course of which Madame la Mie, who understood German very nearly as well as did her son François, discovered that the girl was hopelessly in love. A country parson's daughter, with nothing in the world but her pretty face, to aspire to become the wife of her

son! Madame la Mie laid her hand on the flushed, burning forehead—“*Drôle de petite! quelle bêtise!*”

None the less did she nurse the girl tenderly. For days Margaret showed no signs of recovery; but then improvement set in slowly. Meanwhile, events showed that Frau Metzle had prophesied truly. Within a week of this trio's advent, visitors from Geneva began to find their way to the Pension Edelweiss; and when finally the long tussle with sickness in the darkened upper room had ended in the victory of youth, and the queer little medical gentleman had issued the proclamation, “*We are out of danger,*” there was a goodly company under the same roof with Margaret to welcome her to their midst. To name only one, there was Captain Walter Macnab, of whom you possibly have heard as upholding in Geneva our reputation of being the most crazy nation in Europe. This gentleman's great pleasure is to hunt the cheap quarters of the town for bargains, then blandly to ask the price of the same articles in one or other of the most fashionable shops (say, in the Corraterie), and, on learning what they are, to flourish his cheap acquisitions in the face of the indignant shopkeeper or his genteel young man. Another humorous trait in the captain is his passion for buying wholesale, with a view to profiting by the reduction. I submit the following:

On the 20th of August, 1883, Captain Macnab bought up the entire stock in legs of mutton of a certain butcher in Geneva. The reduction in price was marvellous; marvellous was also the fury of Miss Macnab, the captain's sister, when, on arriving home one day, she found her larder present the appearance of a butcher's shop on no small scale. Her eccentric brother had, at different times, bought up, wholesale, crockery, haberdashery, and tea;

but had hitherto confined himself to the purchase of such articles as, supposing himself and Miss Macnab to live to a Biblical old age, they might have gradually consumed between them, whereas his latest investment was of the unhappiest species conceivable, the proverb *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*, being one which, if legs of mutton could speak, they would certainly admit to be peculiarly applicable to them. For five days running the brother and sister lived on mutton in every imaginable shape—mutton roasted, mutton boiled, mutton stewed, and mutton minced; mutton for breakfast, for luncheon, for dinner. On the 26th of August, the morning meal at the captain's, that meal at which people all over the world meet to be silently impressive, was enlivened by a dramatic scene. Taking her seat at the head of the table, Miss Macnab fixed her eye on the leg of mutton in the middle of it, and in a finely sustained monotone asked, Was it for this that she had remained Miss Macnab? for this that she had sacrificed her life on the altar of sisterly love? for this—— Here her voice was drowned in the clatter of table-appointments, as the captain took up the joint and bade the servant move it without delay.

“I ask,” continued Miss Macnab, raising her voice, *ma non troppo*, as they say in music, and fixing her eye on the retiring damsel, then on the door through which she had made her exit—“I ask, am I to have the conduct of this house, or am I not? Am I to understand that I live with a rational being, or am I not? Am I to set up a butcher's shop on the premises, or am I not?”

“My dear Olympia——”

“Walter, I request that you will not answer me. I shall take my breakfast in my own room.”

And Miss Macnab, having for some mysterious reason

of her own, "asked" three questions, any answer to which she would not permit, rose and sailed majestically through the door held open by the always courteous, if eccentric, captain.

That gentleman took a walk round the room, whistling an air which truth compels me to say was not classic; then softly rang the bell—a proceeding which the damsel before named rightly interpreted, and forthwith re-appeared, bearing the obnoxious joint. After making a hearty meal on this, the captain descended to the larder. Here he wrapped the remaining joints in neat brown paper parcels; then called a cab, and got into it with his packages. How often he alighted from that cab on his trip round Geneva, nobody knows; but few of his friends remained unvisited, and Monsieur la Mie is one of those who delight to remember that at his house among others, on that 26th of August, did the English captain present himself, with a curiously shaped brown paper parcel, of which he begged acceptance, and which turned out to contain a leg of mutton.

Captain Macnab was an elderly man, and one of those men concerning whom women are pretty unanimously agreed that the laws of civilized countries ought to do something for their partial suppression, if not total annihilation; men who, otherwise pretty harmless, nay, not altogether without merit, have the obnoxious habit of telling stories interminably long, the peculiar wit of which is evident to themselves alone; who set their pride in saying to every one the exact opposite to what they mean, with a chuckle intended to add, "Funny way, this of mine, isn't it?" who at some remote period of their lives have made a good joke, and spend the rest of their days regretting that they should have forgotten it; who, ac-

customed as they are to dinner-party speaking, propound on every occasion what they call the views of gentlemen; who have a preference for striped cloth, loud neckties, the newest things in canes and gloves; and who—climax of horrors!—have that in their voice and gait which shows you at once that they regard life as an immense plum-pie, and themselves as belonging to the family of the immortal Jack, their sole vocation being to put in a thumb and take out a plum, with the familiar comment on the act.

Such was Captain Macnab, and well might his maiden sister sigh.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S SISTER.—THE FAMILY PEACHUM.—A TALK IN THE ARBOUR BETWEEN MISS MACNAB AND MISS PEACHUM.

MISS MACNAB belonged essentially to that type of lady dubbed by young men, rather unceremoniously, "old girls." She wore her hair dressed exceedingly high, for no one, she said, but a Venus could wear her hair dressed low, "and," she was wont to add, "we of the family Macnab do not set up to be Venuses."

Considering Olympia's hair was of that colour for which the *Précieuses* invented the ingenious name of *blond hardi* (Miss Macnab herself called it sometimes "deep auburn," sometimes "warm gold"), and considering it was, moreover, thickly streaked with grey; considering that Miss Macnab had the smallest of small pale blue eyes, a feature of which was their lacking the usual accompaniment of lashes and brows, this always giving a curious expression to the human face; considering that she had a very long nose, a very long upper lip, a very

long neck, and an uncommonly long back; and considering that all these were features peculiar to the ladies "of the family Macnab," it would truly have been most remarkable had any of them "set up to be Venuses."

"No, we are not vain," Miss Macnab would add, "though there are two things of which we are pleasantly conscious; one of them, this." As she spoke, Miss Macnab would raise her lip at the left side. "So we Macnabs smile at our enemies. Did you ever see a smile like that?" (Those whom it did not blight on the spot confessed that they never did.) "The other—this." Here Miss Macnab would draw herself up to her full height, as you may have noticed a wasp do—and remarkably like that graceful insect she looked, in her wondrous slimness—and would continue, "We Macnabs think nothing of faces; we pique ourselves on form. Did you ever see a form like that?" (Again an unqualified "Never!")

Delicious Miss Macnab!

Somehow, one feels this type must soon die out; what with high schools for girls and higher schools for women, the consumption of midnight oil at Girton and Newnham, etc., the most sanguine among us scarcely dare hope that the next generation will have its Miss Macnab. This person speaks of her friends sometimes as ladies, more often as gentlewomen (*never* as women); this person, when she has seen you five minutes, will tell you that you remind her "so" of darling Janet, a friend of her childhood (please never speak of Janet, because it hurts her "so"); this person, our Miss Macnab, is not two days at Les Plans before she had sent to Janet's sister sixteen pages of closely written foreign note, containing an elaborate description of every getatable nook in the place, a plan of the boarding-house and its grounds, with a picture

of the former drawn by herself, and resembling a chess-board seen through a mist, perhaps, more than anything else, in one of the squares being written, "My window, dear."

Delicious Miss Macnab!

Considering that what Goethe said years ago of Germany—"Has it not been from end to end journeyed through, crossed through, marched through, crept through, and flown through?" might be said with more truth of Switzerland than of any other country in the inhabited globe, with the addition, perhaps, of the question, Has it not been painted, described, belauded, besung, by all who have ever journeyed through, crossed through, marched through, crept through, or flown through it?—it seems odd that people should still exist who, like Miss Macnab, labour under the delusion that they are doing a friendly office to those they cherish in giving them long epistolary descriptions of mountains, glaciers, and hotels.

Unhappy sister of defunct Janet, to whom this letter of Miss Macnab's is addressed!

Having finished writing it, interlined it here and there with peculiarly illegible afterthoughts, added a slip of paper containing a copy of the first day's bill of fare, with marginal notes on every item thereof, and, to sum up, the remark at foot—"Very moderate, I think, on the whole, dear,"—Miss Macnab looks up some flowers, pressed specially for Janet's sister. The passion for pressing flowers is one which it is again hard to understand, and, when they who have it, not satisfied with the pleasure of crushing the beauty out of a thing which, excepting its beauty, has nothing, go the length of sending the mangled remains carefully folded up in letters to friends, one is tempted to inveigh. Who that has not nerves of iron

does not shudder to recall the mummies of roses, especially of "Alp-roses," that have been sent to him by tourist-friends? It is the nature of the latter flower, as it is that of its English cousin, the rhododendron, in nine cases out of ten to turn all the colours of the rainbow in the process of pressing, finally settling into black; so that of all pressed plants it presents, perhaps, the ghastliest spectacle. Olympia's specimens were no exception to the rule. From a collection of small, shrivelled black objects, she took out three, and laid them tenderly into her letter to Janet's sister.

Such was Olympia, and, to sum up, Olympia was in love with Monsieur la Mie. More than this, she was "quite sure" that Monsieur la Mie was in love with her, which was rather an unfortunate thing for him, because, to let you into her confidence, she had made a vow to marry "nobody" so long as her brother Walter remained unmarried.

Now, perhaps you might like to know how Miss Macnab became "quite sure" that Monsieur la Mie was in love with her. It happened thus.

I have as yet not mentioned an American family called Peachum, staying at the Pension Edelweiss, and which consisted of three members—Mrs. Peachum, a sharp-featured, sharp-voiced lady; Miss Peachum, her sister-in-law, equally sharp-featured, equally sharp-voiced; and a small girl, Die, of sharpness, mental and physical, indescribable. To mention only one of Die's infantile ways, it was her fashion to pass the following three remarks on whatever struck her sharp little eyes as pleasing:—"I like it! I want it! I'll *have* it!" As may be imagined, she frequently got it. When she did not, it was her custom to throw herself in a sitting attitude on

the floor, stretch out her feet, and scream to the echo. At this point, Mrs. Peachum would descant on the curious way in which children inherit what she called "the temperature" of their fathers: so Die. "Yes, that's so," this American lady would add, pointing dramatically to the interesting juvenile. "You see her father sitting there; that was just his way—just his way."

It is said that Madame la Mie had remarked (and one is almost tempted to agree with her) that if this was indeed the way of the departed Mr. Peachum, it is hard to understand that his fame is not more widely spread than it is; for surely a New York trader who, when the world would not dance to his tune of "I like it! I want it! I'll have it!" would throw himself on the floor, stretch out his feet, and scream to the echo, seems a phenomenon that should not soon be forgotten.

In justice to Mrs. Peachum as an educationalist, it should be added that when, as commonly happened, Miss Die having begun to scream, persevered in so doing lustily for a period exceeding half an hour, with no sign of fatigue to the lungs, that lady with her own hands administered *con spirito* what she termed a "spanking." In fact, it was rare for a day to pass without this process taking place more than once, it being absolutely impossible, with the best will in the world, to give the sweet child everything she desired. To return, however, to Miss Macnab and Miss Peachum, senior; for it is with this lady that we have to do in connection with the one love-episode in the life of the captain's sister.

The momentous dialogue between these two ladies which led to Miss Macnab's feeling "quite sure" that Monsieur la Mie was in love with her, took place in the

garden of the Edelweiss. Here Miss Macnab and Miss Peachum sat side by side in an arbour.

It has so often been said that Dame Nature never repeats herself, and that no two blades of grass are alike, that one hesitates to say what is nevertheless a fact, that many of Nature's productions, like the often-quoted two blades of grass, are so amazingly similar that the idea is apt to arise that Dame Nature does indeed sometimes repeat herself; and then, with the duplicate of former work before her, by a dash here and a chip there effects those artful little differences which have to this day kept up her somewhat dubious reputation for exhaustless originality. Miss Macnab and Miss Peachum formed curious instances of this, being, without there existing the least blood-relationship between them to explain the fact, so ludicrously alike that at first sight almost any one seeing them seated side by side would have looked upon them as facsimiles. This idea seems to have flashed upon Dame Nature herself in the eleventh hour, just in time for her to send Miss Macnab into the world minus eyebrows, and—this a stroke upon which none but herself would venture—to curtail Miss Peachum between the waist and feet, leaving her long as Miss Macnab between the head and waist; thereby, at the grievous risk of beauty, it must be admitted, producing the necessary difference. As for the points of resemblance, they may be quickly enumerated. The two ladies had hair the same shade, with the same intermingling of grey; small blue eyes, the same; very long noses, the same; long upper lips, the same; long necks, long backs, the same.

Miss Peachum spoke. "I am not a flatterer, Olympia, and I won't pretend to say I know what it is about you

that has taken him so. You are not so young as you once were, dear——”

Miss Macnab could not draw herself up, for she sat bolt upright as it was; but she visibly bridled, as she replied distantly that she was aware she had once been a babe in arms.

“There now!” Miss Peachum affected to be in a pet, a curious thing in a lady of her length of back. “I can’t help being frank, Olympia; and when I say the Professor’s in love with you, I am not going to add a falsehood and say it is your youthful beauty that won him. We’re not sixteen, dear, either of us, any more than we’re babes in arms, and I confess if I had not heard it from his own lips, I should wonder at his selecting you from among the many pretty girls about here; yes, I should—so there!”

As she spoke Miss Peachum rose, and with her Miss Macnab. Curious metamorphosis! The two long-waisted ladies so strangely resembling each other in face and figure when sitting, developed, when standing, the most remarkable difference—that is to say, the long neck and back of Miss Peachum sank far beneath the long neck and back of Miss Macnab; and as the two friends walked side by side down the garden walk, the English lady presented to view that formation, the outward signs of which are a long bodice and a long skirt, while the American lady afforded an instance of that the outward signs of which are a long bodice and—a little skirt.

“Yes, you are frank, Mildred,” said Miss Macnab, after a while, and when they had passed through the garden into the road; “and yet your very frankness——” Here Miss Macnab flushed over cheeks and forehead to

the tip of her nose; then she turned away, and, long-waisted lady that she was, sped down the road and through the garden back to the Edelweiss.

The sun was setting opposite, turning for a moment as it rested on the mountains their ghastly shrouds of white into robes of royal purple. The little lady with the long waist, with all the glory of the sunset on her, laughed a short, harsh laugh.

CHAPTER XIX.

OLYMPIA DRESSES.—TWO CHASTE WHITE ROSEBUDS.—PAINTINGS IN SEPIA.—OLYMPIA BLUSHES.

HURRYING down the road towards the garden of the Pension Edelweiss was Miss Macnab when we left her. She is now in her bedroom. Disembodied as we are, there can be no impropriety in following her thither.

Turned romantic at thirty-eight, alas! our poor Olympia is in love for the first time at thirty-eight. She stands before her mirror. Dear, that horrid blush! Why does it still linger in the tip of her nose? Where is her little oatmeal-bag? There really is nothing like oatmeal! Into it with the rosy feature—a little delicate manipulation; follow close inspection, first *en face*, then with a hand-glass from the side; a little brushing of her hair; some smoothing of invisible eyebrows; a change of frill; the substitution of a pink for a blue ribbon at the throat; the insertion of two rosebuds between the third and fourth button of her dress; a scarce perceptible tightening of the waistband; and Olympia views her long, slim figure with a smile of satisfaction. No; Mildred is right—she is not a babe in arms, nor a chit of a girl; but it strikes her more forcibly than ever on this particular

evening that she has indeed "form," and the Macnabs, you know, never thought anything of faces. And was not a man of his age just the one who would be captivated by form versus face, by carriage versus your white and pink complexion? "A man of his age"—what age? In point of fact, Monsieur la Mie has the advantage of Miss Macnab by half a dozen years; howbeit, in accrediting him with no greater youth than herself, Miss Macnab falls in with the prevalent opinion, according to which the Professor is nearer forty than thirty—nay, some go so far as to say that he is forty-three, a fashionable age, as the reader has been told, with gentlemen in Geneva.

On the top of the stairs Miss Macnab meets Miss Peachum.

"You, Milly? Come back to my room with me, will you? My heart is all of a flutter. Yes; sit down in that chair. I must talk this matter over with you again;" and Miss Macnab seats herself on the side of her bed, the only chair in the room being occupied by her friend. "If what you say, and what my own heart has sometimes whispered to me, dear, be right—— Don't stare at me so, Mildred; you confuse me so."

Miss Peachum, like most adepts at the lie direct, piques herself on her frank gaze. She laughs, and turns the back of her chair to poor embarrassed Olympia.

"I want to ask you, Mildred, why, if his feelings are what you say, he has never breathed a word of—of love to me?"

Miss Peachum laughs her merriest laugh, as if the idea that a man in love should breathe a word of—of love, were one of the rarest jokes she had ever heard.

"Why, Olympia," she exclaimed, "one would think

you had never before known what it was to have any one in love with you!"

Now, this was exactly the case, though not for the world would Miss Macnab have confessed it to Miss Peachum.

"It—er—it has struck me as strange," she said, "that he only talks to me in English, about English, or England."

"Well, if *that* isn't enough!" exclaims the American lady. "Why, if you had as much knowledge of men as a new-born babe, Olympia" — Olympia blushing intimates that it is her pride to own that she dares lay claim to little more—"you would know that a man of his age doesn't seek out the society of a woman of your stamp, and speak to her in her language, about her language, and about her country, unless he— —"

"But his manner, dear," interrupts Miss Macnab. It is inexpressibly sweet to her to have her passing fears dispelled by this outspoken friend. "I have sometimes thought his manner was not that of—of—"

"Pooh, Olympia! Without having ever seen him with you, I know precisely what his manner is. You are not the first Englishwoman with whom a French *savant* ever fell in love. Tell me if I am wrong."—Here she half turns her chair round—"Seemingly dry and self-contained, he will stop you in the midst of speaking to ask you how you would parse that sentence, was that phrase pure English or slang, was that verb regular, and would you spell that word with two *t*'s or one—eh?"

Poor Olympia falters that this is, oddly enough, a very fair epitome of Monsieur la Mie's style of conversation with her; nay, she is ingenuous enough to add that, when his vein becomes sentimental, he is apt to become—well, she will not say absurd, but just to give you

an idea of what she means, he will go into raptures over the "buttons" on the trees, or the "fools" in the poultry-yard; and only yesterday, making use of that unhappy selection of words into which foreigners in their desire to speak colloquial English are ever blundering, had asked her, as the one who most often heard him speak English, to "be so good as to give him a little wink when he said a little bosh"—a remark which, made with perfect artlessness though it was, caused Miss Macnab, in retailing it, to say, "As I think it over, Milly, I really should not be surprised myself this minute if, listening to it, I had dropped down dead." And in this, no doubt, the good lady was right; it being a fact pretty widely known that victims to sudden decease do not themselves, some twenty-four hours later, evince surprise at the event.

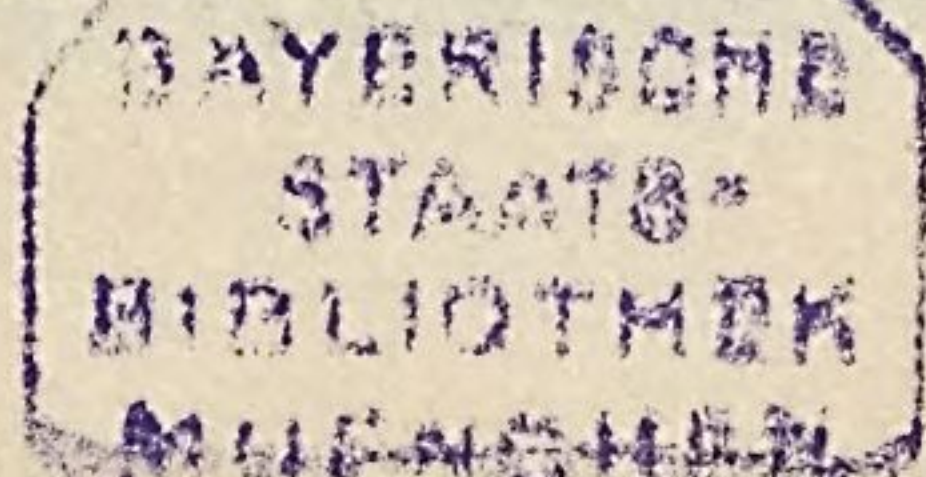
Poor Olympia! It would not have needed the strongest eyes to see the tremble in the shoulders of Miss Peachum, as she listened to this recital. But Olympia's eyes were of the weakest, and Miss Peachum was equal to the part which, for reasons of her own, she had undertaken to play.

"You ridiculous creature!" she exclaimed, in her bluff tone. "You know you are only talking against your own convictions. By the way, I do so like you in that pink ribbon, Olympia; but why haven't you flowers to match? Take these of mine"—loosening a bunch of pink blossoms. "You won't. Why not?"

Was it her "convictions" beaming in the eyes of Olympia? She pointed to the small white decoration at her bosom. "Not pink blossoms to-day, Mildred dear, thank you. Two chaste white rosebuds, nothing more."

Again there was a visible tremble in the shoulders of Miss Peachum. Then the ladies betook themselves to

the sitting-room, where Miss Macnab busied herself with painting, if by that name may be called a certain desecration of art very common among Englishwomen. Surely our national dread of "mischief still" has led to nothing more unfortunate than this busying of "idle hands" with playing or with painting, totally irrespective of talent, and with barbarous disregard of our neighbour's eyes and ears. As to determining which of the two practices is the more to be condemned, it is as impossible as to settle which is worse, bad toothache or bad headache. Perhaps the scale inclines a little on the side of bad toothache, and perhaps bad playing is a trifle worse than bad painting; but, indeed, I can think of no doom more melancholy in a small way than to have on all sides of one, waking and sleeping, the blurred sepia presentments of Alpine scenery, which Miss Macnab produced at the rate of six a day, and pinned to the walls of her own and her brother's rooms. Miss Macnab is a favourite of mine. I like her length of spine; her stateliness; her trust in Milly, and fidelity to the shade of Janet; her maidenly preference for chaste white rosebuds; her smile of scorn at one side of her lip; her name Olympia. The one, the only thing, which, to be frank, I do not, and never did, like about her is—her passion for painting. The memory of it and of her sepia landscapes still makes me shudder. Sepia at its best is—sepia; and a work of art in which Mont Blanc, as in sepia, is of necessity represented as more or less wrapped in a London fog of the usual tint, while in the distance looms a lake like a yellow sea, must be executed with wondrous skill not to make one feel that, in the interest of truth, such a libel on nature should be suppressed. Miss Macnab's paintings were not executed with wondrous skill, nor was her



method perhaps of the best. It was her custom first to draw her entire picture in pencil. This she did in no shamefaced, deceitful way, as making believe that her work was a production of the brush alone, but in thick, black lines; and albeit that process deserve all praise from a moral point of view, it is not to be recommended from an artistic one. After the pencil came the sepia, which, though laid on with no sparing hand, somehow failed to conceal the lead; nay, as though all the elves of mischief were at work with Miss Macnab's paint-brush, the fluid spread by it had a tendency to run here and there into large opaque masses, more like black-beetles, perhaps, than anything else, whilst the rest of the picture presented the dismal appearance of having been dipped into very mild tea.

I believe I am speaking the truth when I say that Miss Macnab was herself under no delusion as to her lack of talent for painting. She had merely taken to it as a means of killing the time, and preserved her productions in sepia, because, she would tell you, they were invested with interest for her and her friends, as "my paintings;" much as a certain window at the Pension Edelweiss was invested with interest for her and her friends as "my window." I think I may also affirm that she took to the art as inexpensive and convenient; and, though this I will not *affirm*, I will venture to suggest that Miss Macnab thought painting an eminently graceful occupation, especially painting in sepia. It is not fatty work, such as painting in oil; and does not cover you with red, blue, and green, as does painting in colours. It calls for a good deal of switching the brush about in water, and then, as every one knows who has ever painted, especially painted in sepia, you can place your brush

between your lips with a pensive expression, or, if you prefer it, a look that is childlike and bland, like that of the Heathen Chinee in Bret Harte. It was a look of the latter description that Miss Macnab commonly wore when she held her brush in this position; though I beg that none of my readers will on that account for a moment imagine that she had in her composition one drop of the guile which characterized the arch-hypocrite rendered immortal by the American humorist.

"Good morning, Miss Macnab!" The voice is that of Monsieur la Mie. "I am right, am I not, that you English say 'Good morning' all day long?"

"*Indeed* we don't. What *funny* ideas you foreigners have!" says Miss Macnab, largely italicizing, as—frantically switching her brush—she sends a shower of sepia spray on everything around.

As fate would have it, Monsieur la Mie was especially attentive to her this evening, and never probably did a heart flutter more than that of hers beneath the two chaste white rosebuds. What though their conversation as usual chiefly turned on English, as it is spoken, has been spoken, might be spoken, and should be spoken; what though the Professor put Miss Macnab through "will" and "shall" for the twentieth time, for the twentieth time to learn from the Scotchwoman that connected with "will" and "shall" is a mystery which never will nor shall be explained; what though they got through some solid work in parsing and spelling; what though the Professor seemed mainly anxious to polish up his pronunciation, and enrich his vocabulary, ere you scoff at the notion of Monsieur la Mie's being in love with Olympia, or cry shame on the heart beneath the two chaste white rosebuds, answer me this: Why, among all the English ladies at Les Plans, did

Monsieur la Mie select Miss Macnab to discuss with her the mysteries of English? And why, on this particular evening, did he bring up for the first time the subject of "like" and "love?" Why did he say, with his irresistible smile—

"I should like to know from you, Miss Macnab, what is the difference you make between the words 'like' and 'love'?"

Is it not asking too much from any lady romantically inclined, to expect that she should see in such a question the curiosity of the linguist only? Was it not natural that Miss Macnab should at this point have lost what head she ever had, and, feigning to hear a "call without," have betaken herself in all haste away from the Professor, to fling herself into the arms of her dearest Milly, and gasp, "Tell me, Mildred, am I like a peony, dear? I never felt myself blush so—*in—my—life.*"

CHAPTER XX.

SCRUPLES.—MISS PEACHUM'S UNCLE.—NOT A MARRYING MAN.

—MONSIEUR LA MIE IN A STATE OF INCERTITUDE.

I SHOULD deem it little short of indelicacy to follow up last chapter with a betrayal in cold blood of the whispered outpourings of Olympia to her friend. For the first time speaking above a whisper, she said at last—

"No, Milly, say what you will, I could not *think* of marrying as long as my brother Walter remains unmarried. You may call it 'absurd,' in your frank way; and yet, what right have you to accuse me of over-scrupulousness who yourself have sacrificed your life's happiness to a chimera?"

"Chimera!" Miss Peachum rose. Her doing so was

a mistake. She meant to be dignified, and dignified standing she was not. "Chimera!" She repeated the word, employing the greatest pressure of tongue to produce a fine guttural sound, and speaking in that falsetto which adepts in the management of the voice recommend as expressive of violent emotion. It was a good word to have to repeat; as, if you have ever given the matter attention, you must have noticed that *k* is pre-eminently the letter of scorn. "My *uncle* a chimera! Oh, I never expected this, Olympia; never! Least of all from you!"

So saying, with her head in the air, Miss Peachum trotted away; a reason with which the reader is acquainted making it impossible for this long-backed lady to stride, as did her long-backed friend.

And who was her uncle? Before I answer that question, I venture to make a remark. Be prosy as we will, we must acknowledge that there is in the acquaintance-ship which precedes every friendship one all-important moment—the one in which for the first time a small interchange of confidence takes place, in which for the first time the conversation turns not on those subjects of world-wide interest, ranging from politics to the weather, but on some subject of vital interest to one of the speakers alone; say, in the case of a man, his money difficulties; of a woman, her family troubles; of a maiden, her soul's history. When these topics crop up for the first time, one instinctively feels that a decisive moment has arrived; that now or never must one decide to be more than a mere acquaintance to this man, to this woman, or to this maiden.

In the case of Miss Peachum, the said all-important moment was signalized not merely by the narration of her soul's history, but by the mention for the first time—

you may say, it is true, as part and parcel of that history—of her uncle; that is, she would confide to you, entreating you to keep it a dead secret, that she was heiress to enormous wealth (her uncle's), which, of course, every one in Boston knew—she dimly implied that every one in the New World knew it—and that is why she could never bring herself to marry. It was “so horrible” to feel yourself representing a fortune, and the thing would of course get bruited about, do what she might to prevent it.

(In parenthesis, her uncle was a fiction.)

“Mildred!” The voice was Miss Macnab's at the door of Miss Peachum. Some half-hour had elapsed since that unhappy moment in which the Scotchwoman had wounded her friend. “Mildred!” She tapped a second time.

Admittance was granted; apology offered and accepted; then Olympia asked advice with reference to her brother.

“I don't see, after all, dear, why Walter should not marry—do you?”

Miss Peachum replied that it was a source of, she might say, daily mystification to her that the captain was still a bachelor.

“H'm!” said Olympia. “We're not a marrying family, Mildred. We never were.”

Miss Peachum replied, in her funny way, that she—er—supposed there had been a certain number of marriages in the family.

“Well, yes,” Olympia admitted absently, fixing her eye on a small open box on the toilet-table, and deciding mentally that she might supplement nature as well in that way as her friend, “*some* marriages. Oh yes”—suddenly brightening up—“dear me! to be sure, yes. Nevertheless, we are, Mildred, what is generally termed ‘not a marrying family;’ uncles, aunts, cousins, male and

female; brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces—I don't know how many of us there are unmarried. To return to my brother Walter, he's really"—she bent forward, unconsciously as it were, to examine the box more closely—"as pleasant a man as you could meet; and yet——Well, you see, dear, he's not a marrying man."

Miss Peachum remarked, a little tartly, that she had barely spoken twenty words with the captain. Then, having inwardly fumed during Miss Macnab's inspection of her toilet-table appointments, she took up the small box in question, and passed it to her, saying with great *bonhomie*, "Imparts, I am told, a peachlike bloom to the cheeks."

"Indeed!" Miss Macnab put it down quickly. "What was I talking about. Why, yes—Walter. I thought, by the way, you and he were sworn friends, Mildred. He hinted as much to me yesterday."

"Did he?" Something like a very faint light came into the small, dim eyes of Miss Peachum, and she tried to look modestly confused, but failed; because a woman cannot look modest who cannot blush, or whose blushes are hidden away beneath a superadded peach-like bloom. "Well, you know, I insist on playing duenna to that Mademoiselle Roland, who, giddy girl that she is, will go strolling with him. An incorrigible flirt she is, by the way; and yet I like her, somehow, and often think—do you know?—the captain could hardly make a better choice than——"

"Mildred, if you ever were my friend, do not say that! I have an unsurmountable aversion to the girl, who runs after—after every one. Do you seriously think she is setting her cap at my brother? Why, I should never forgive myself, if——"

"My goodness, what an excitable creature it is! Never mind, Olympia. I really am honestly fond of the girl, and as for her setting her cap at the captain, why, supposing she does, I don't see the harm in it—excepting that it might end in herself being disappointed, poor soul; inasmuch as you say, dear"—slightly emphasizing the words, and with a return of the faint flash in her eyes—*"he's not a marrying man."*

A few further words, and the strange couple parted. "For the sake of the girl," Miss Peachum continued to accompany Eugénie Roland and the captain on their daily strolls, this young person having taken it into her head to bring the English officer to her feet in the pauses of courting the admiration of the Professor; and the captain being quite ready to practise his French with a pretty girl, whose laying siege to his well-fortified old heart in no small degree amused him.

Meanwhile, Monsieur la Mie was torn between two doubts: the first, whether or not he quite hated Eugénie Roland; the second, whether or not he quite loved Margaret Winkelried. He decided to leave in abeyance any decision in this matter, inasmuch as a small voice whispered that he should soon see again Marie Minard—and, perhaps, he might decide that he quite loved her.

For the present, like the wise man that he was, he resolved to take the world as it came; and, since Miss Macnab was pleased to talk English with him, to devote himself to rubbing up with her his knowledge of that language. So much for what lay at bottom of all the talks that set going pit-a-pat the foolish heart beneath the two chaste white rosebuds.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARGARET WINKELRIED WRITES A LETTER.

WHAT of Margaret Winkelried, meanwhile? The arms that had borne her into the Edelweiss on the day of her arrival, carried her on the day of her first quitting her room down the narrow winding stairs leading to the general sitting-room.

As he entered the room with his pale, beautiful burden, every face turned towards the Professor. Laying the girl on the sofa, he seated himself beside her; then—perhaps it was chance—all eyes turned to Eugénie Roland, who, with her mother, sat at a window at the other end of the room.

“To think that you too were in the carriage”—it was Margaret speaking to the Professor. “That drive to Les Plans seems all like some horrible dream to me. Bit by bit it comes back, up to the terrible moment when Ami reared. He seemed to me to turn into some monster, and then——”

“Well, then?”

“Then all became dark and quiet.” As she spoke the girl covered her face with her hands, with the true abandonment of an invalid. Did she see there were others in the room? Probably not. “I thought it was death,” she said, leaning forward and speaking in a whisper. “*You* only know the rest. Tell me about it.”

Her voice had sunk so as to be scarcely audible; her face was deeply flushed. The Professor looked towards the door as though wishing his mother would come; then smoothing the cushions, laid back the girl's head himself.

“Do not go away,” she exclaimed, speaking with closed eyes, as she might have done to a hired nurse.

"No." He lowered his voice and whispered something to her that made her smile, then frown.

At that moment the voice of Eugénie Roland rang through the room.

"Don't hold me, mother; I *will*! I could take a jump from a window much higher than this, and sprain no foot either." And with a laugh that did not drown her mother's cry, the mad girl took the leap.

A rush to the door and window, a confused sound of several voices, made the Professor's silence and indifference the more remarkable. When he spoke, it was only to say to Margaret lightly and with the national shrug—

"What it is to set a fashion! Mademoiselle Roland wants to sprain her foot as you did."

"You think she meant to hurt herself?"

"Think it?" The Professor raised his eyebrows to meet his hair. "You see the height of the window."

"And you stay here perfectly calm?"

"*Ma foi!*"—again a shrug. "Others have gone to her aid."

Something in his tone caused Margaret to look up. What glorious eyes she had! In a moment his doubts took flight. Surely he quite hated Eugénie Roland, and quite—quite loved Margaret Winkelried.

He had started to his feet; he now sat down again at her side.

"Margaret——" he began.

She stopped him peremptorily. "I am ill; I am tired. Will you do me a favour?"

He would fly to Geneva at her bidding; to Germany, to the end of the earth; he would——

"Nay, it is nothing so great as that." She smiled,

with a touch of her old archness. "Will you ring that bell for me?"

He did so; and Babette, Frau Metzle's handmaid, entered. An order to bring paper and writing-materials was quickly obeyed.

"Thank you—wait"—as Babette turned to go. "I have only a word to write, and want you to take it to the post without delay. Can you?"

"*Ei, ja!*—when I have smartened myself a bit."

Babette, a true German, was always ready to run on any errand, on the understanding that she might first "smart" herself a bit, her idea of being smart (or *schön*, as she called it) being that which obtains with young women of her rank in most countries outside England. With honest red hands—red from the wash-basin—with comely shining face, and glossy bare head; with a clean white apron over her clean blue frock, she returned in less than three minutes, and declared that she was ready to "spring away" (*hin springen*). And "spring away" she forthwith did with Margaret's letter, to the shed which is at Les Plans euphemistically called "post-office." True, she smoothed her apron and slackened her pace, as she passed the cottage at the bend in the road, but the killing young man, her compatriot, none the less only got a pout and an "Oh, then leave me alone!" ("*Ach, lasse' Sie mir meine Ruh'!*") for the pains he was at to make her smile.

Strangely enough, till she turned that same bend in the road, the most interesting feature in all the landscape was to Monsieur la Mie that indicated by the short, flapping, dark-blue skirt clearly defined above some quarter of a yard of white stocking. In another instant skirt and stocking vanished; vanished also the killing young cot-

tager, looking nowise discomfited as he re-entered his dwelling. Yet another sixty seconds, and the Professor told himself that the letter confided to Babette had been dropped into the letter-box.

He looked perplexed, and, very faintly, sighed; then started, threw open the window, and leant forward, as surprised by what he saw as ever was mortal man;—and well he might be so.

CHAPTER XXII.

SURPRISE.—HUMOUR.

THE sight of only one carriage bearing tourists was an interesting thing at Les Plans at the beginning of the season. The sight of *two* was at such a time an unusual thing at that primitive health-resort. As for *three*, following each other within short distances, the thing was unparalleled, and so extraordinary beyond anything in the memory of man in these parts, that but a weak idea is given of the surprise which it roused, when it is said that Babette, on her way to the post, with her apron-strings flying, rushed blindly back right into the arms of the killing young cottager, who, with his arms extended—in surprise, of course—had rushed blindly into the road; that mine hostess of the Rose des Alpes, with her eyes starting out of their sockets, rushed headlong into the arms of mine hostess of the Pension Edelweiss, who, with her mouth wide open, was flying into space; and that the surprise felt by Monsieur la Mie, it alone was as great as that felt by all these good people combined; as great, that is, as the double surprise of Babette, first at sight of the carriages, then at sight of herself in the arms of her killing young countryman, who

—in his surprise, of course—had continued to hold her there; and the double surprise of this youth, first at sight of the carriages, then at sight of Babette in his arms, who—in her surprise, of course—had continued to stay there; not to count his pleasant surprise that a kiss which, in his surprise, he gave to Babette, she, in her surprise should return; and the equal surprise of mine hostess, Frau Metzle, first at sight of the carriages, then at sight of herself in the arms of mine hostess, Madame Auguier, whose surprise was no less than hers, for much the same reasons; not to mention the great and unpleasant surprise on the part of both ladies, as each, in her horror at finding herself in the arms of the other, receded so quickly as to cause a loss of balance, which all but resulted in both being suddenly seated at opposite sides of the road.

That Monsieur la Mie's astonishment was greater than that of all these good folks, the reader will understand shortly.

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You know the air people have who belong to each other, yet wish to appear not to do so. Such was precisely that worn by the *thirteen Christian gentlewomen*, for it was they, and not they alone.

Out of the first carriage bounded Marie Minard, bounded Miss Scollop, bounded Mademoiselle Robert, bounded the brunette misnamed Mina, bounded the Orientalist—all of them introduced to the reader some chapters back.

Out of the second carriage bounded Mademoiselle Robin, better known as *Gendarme*; bounded the non-descript young woman; bounded no less than *six* other ladies, making in all thirteen, being the entire feminine staff of the Academy Morel.

Out of the third carriage bounded—Madame Morel herself.

It was at this point that the expression alluded to above was most strongly marked in the faces of the—fourteen ladies.

Madame Morel was the first to break silence. With her eyebrows more raised than even habitually, fixing her whitey-brown eyes on the group, and rubbing her hands as usual, she exclaimed, with her little whinnying laugh, "How, ladies! Odd that we should have *all* of us have hit on Les Plans this year."

Spoke, and hopped into the Rose des Alpes.

"This is too dreadful," said Marie Minard, looking about her. "Supposing we make in a body for the opposite inn. No, no! Don't you see Monsieur la Mie at a window there? What a curious coincidence! How on earth can you smile, Miss Scollop?"—this with irate vehemence—"Does it not strike you that our situation is—is absurd?"

Miss Scollop calmly replied that it was the absurdity of their situation at which, with British eccentricity, she had ventured to smile—a retort which caused Marie Minard to turn up her eyes, invoking patience, the British quality here displayed being one with which our French neighbours have no patience. As Monsieur Taine, who has found the same thing in our literature, with pathos puts it, "They have a sort of wit for their own use, which is indeed far from agreeable, but is entirely original;—*they call it humour.*"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MONSIEUR LOUIS AUGUIER. — ENTRY INTO THE ROSE DES ALPES. — THE SITTING-ROOM AT THE ROSE DES ALPES.

IF I ever took to public self-condemnation, the quality for which I think I should take myself most to task is a habit of putting off what should be done at once. This unhappy trait has led me to write no less than half a volume on Les Plans before introducing to the reader the most important man in that place; for I except Monsieur la Mie in this quality, as but a visitor to Les Plans, and also, to be candid, as a man of genius *lacking talent*. This could not be said of Monsieur Louis Auguier, mine host and head waiter of the Rose des Alpes, right hand and eldest son of mine hostess, Madame Auguier.

There were only two Messrs. Auguier in the canton, and of these mine host of the Rose des Alpes was the elder. Why, therefore, he was called Monsieur Louis Auguier it is hard to say. The thing is a mystery, and, as regards mysteries, it is by this time pretty generally acknowledged that the smaller they are the less do they admit of solution; that, much success as has been had in solving big enigmas, it is hard to recall a single instance in which a little one has not baffled inquiry. One could cite dozens of instances in proof of this—*à quoi bon?* Suffice it to say, that as belonging to the legion of small things inexplicable must be ranked the phenomenon that the eldest Auguier on the gentleman's side, mine host and head waiter of the Rose des Alpes, should be known, and known only, as Monsieur Louis Auguier.

The inhabitants of Les Plans all spoke of him as Monsieur Louis Auguier (sometimes as Monsieur Louis);

his brother spoke of him as Monsieur Louis Auguier (now and then as Monsieur Louis); his mother spoke of him as Monsieur Louis Auguier (NEVER as Monsieur Louis). At the time of which my story deals this gentleman was sixteen years of age. It is not an age which generally inspires feelings of awe, but mine host of the Rose des Alpes was nothing if not an exception to all rules; in connection with which statement I venture to give a full-length portrait of him.

To begin with, he was small and flat; with a small, flat face, and small, flat eyes; with a small, flat nose, and small, flat mouth; with small, flat feet, and small, flat hands; and with the very smallest and flattest of very small, flat voices. From this it may be seen that it was in him not the outer man that impressed. As I think of him at this moment, and recall his extreme smallness, his remarkable youth, whilst, at the same time, I remember how he held sway at the Rose des Alpes; how without him that establishment would have gone to rack and ruin; how it was he who welcomed the incoming visitors, and he who bowed off the outgoing ones; he who raised or lowered the prices at discretion; he beside whose diminutive form the gigantic dimensions of his maternal parent, as well as the burly shape of his younger brother, shrank into nothingness; he whose small, flat eye kept the whole house in thrall;—as I call to mind all this, it is with a feeling of growing veneration for what must have been the inner greatness of Monsieur Louis Auguier. Having said that he was small, I must in justice add that, in the expressive management of a figure and physiognomy not cast perhaps in Nature's finest mould, he had no equal. In graceful inclination of the body from the waist; in effective movement of

the hand from the wrist; in varied expression of the face, more especially of the eye and lip—none, I am certain, can have ever approached Monsieur Louis Auguier. In bowing, the way he would dart out one foot, and then slowly bring the other to meet it, accompanying the act by a bewitching curve of the body, only equalled in grace by the pose of the head—was a thing never to be forgotten; to see him hand a bill was a lesson in deportment, such a dignity—I had almost said such a poetry—did he impart to the trifling act; while as for those whose privilege it has been to transmit money from their hands to his, it has by them been invariably declared that in the delicate performance of what too often degenerates into a clumsy transaction, Monsieur Louis Auguier was unique. Add to all this that his habitual attitude was one of bending forward, the pose of condescension as it is of courtsey; that he always kept his right ear elevated, the sign of earnest attention; whilst with every movement of his foot or hand—especially his hand—he described a line of beauty; and I think all has been said that it is possible to say of mine host and head waiter of the Rose des Alpes, that small, flat, but indescribably “*genteel*, always *genteel*,” gentleman, Monsieur Louis Auguier.

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“Will you walk into my parlour?”

Needless to say the speaker was not the spider, but the hero of this chapter.

“Have you room for—for thirteen of us?” said Mademoiselle Minard, standing at the gate.

Matchless Monsieur Louis! With a wave of his small, flat hand he described that figure which implies the readiness, at any cost, of nobility to oblige. Then

he led the way towards the house. The ladies followed him—and a strange procession they certainly looked; not the least peculiar, our countrywoman, Miss Scollop. This lady walked beside mine host, contemplating him, with a vastly amused air, from beneath a parasol ingeniously lengthened behind by means of a large pocket-handkerchief pinned to it. This device of hers she will recommend to you, if you ever happen to meet her, as, “Believe me, an excellent plan for keeping the sun off the spine.”

Peerless Monsieur Louis! With that good-breeding for which one cannot enough admire him, not a smile crossed his features, as with his small, flat eye he took in the picture of the English lady, nor did his look of deep solemnity change one whit, when, airing her very peculiar French, she said to him—

“*Veuillez me diah, avez-vous déjà très-beaucioup de visitiours?*”

Were I capable of thinking anything mean of Monsieur Louis Auguier, I should say that he understood this question, but turned to it the bothered ear—the fact being that no visitor, man, woman, or child, had yet appeared at the Rose des Alpes. Being, however, incapable of accrediting Monsieur Louis Auguier with anything mean; above all, anything mean in connection with a lady, I submit to the reader the following hypothesis: that Miss Scollop’s question, though clothed in French with which English tourists have familiarized Frenchmen, and though said in a loud clear voice within the nearest possible vicinity to Monsieur Louis Auguier, by some curious and inexplicable stroke of fate, did not pierce the small, flat ear of that gentleman, whence he left it unanswered, his next words being, as, with a grace worthy

of himself, he flung open the door of the small, but pretty boarding-house of which it was his pride to be the manager—

“*Nous voilà!* This, ladies, will be your sitting-room.”

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There is nothing so hard to hit, perhaps, as the happy medium between pride and humility. The ordinary mortal is so apt to be foolishly bumptious or ludicrously diffident. Now, Monsieur Louis Auguier exactly hit the mean between these two extremes. As he stood at the door of the sitting-room, his attitude, whilst modest, had yet so decided a touch of the grandioso in it; his voice, whilst soft, had yet such an unmistakable shade of the maestoso in it, as to make his manner the very perfection of that medium between self-glorification and self-debasement for which English, in common with languages generally, has, I believe, unhappily, no name.

The thirteen ladies of Madame Morel's Academy looked about them—foremost among them Marie Minard; hindmost among them the nondescript young woman; while, as “noticeable” among them, to use a journalistic term, might be mentioned perhaps the lady called *Gendarme*, the brunette, misnamed Mina, Mademoiselle Robert (of the sharp voice), the Orientalist, and—last, not least—Miss Scollop.

All these ladies wore on their faces, more or less strongly marked, the expression which is the result of imbibing air through the nose, the reason of this circumstance being, that from the floor of the room there arose a peculiarly strong bituminous perfume. It was a white, uncarpeted floor, relieved by brown stripes, and from these latter the smell of paraffine came. The oil had evidently

been spread with no sparing hand, and the stripes were in consequence a rich, wet brown.

In the middle of the room stood a table, with a white napkin spread cornerwise on it over a green cloth, and having for central and only ornament a vase of funereal-looking artificial flowers. The rest of the furniture was contained in some twenty upstart, cane-bottomed chairs, and two superannuated sofas, that looked as if they had known grander surroundings, and felt in consequence naturally aggrieved at having to breathe the same air with parvenus. If, however, there was nothing else of service to man or woman in the room, to counterbalance the paucity of the useful, there was a superabundance of the ornamental. The funereal-looking flowers have already been mentioned; be it added that the walls were covered with photographs, pictures chiefly of young men with their hats on, looking remarkably sheepish, and young maidens in crinolines, looking wondrous die-away; not to speak of curious presentments of children, most of whom appeared to have been seized with convulsions in the process of focussing, their weird, blurred likenesses being only surpassed in wondrousness by anomalies in the way of two-headed mothers bending tenderly over multyped babes.

Curiously unimpressed by all these works of art, which held, as it were, entranced the gaze of her colleagues, Miss Scollop suddenly broke the silence which had followed Monsieur Louis Auguier's announcement, and, looking from the floor to mine host and from mine host to the floor, exclaimed in a muffled voice—

“Je ne *poux* pas souffrir cette *odour*; cela *peurce* mon *mouchwore*!”

She was holding what she called her *mouchwore* to

her nose, having, on entering the room, detached it rapidly from her parasol. Calming a little as mine host performed a gesture with shoulder, hand, and eyebrows, the pathos of which was not to be resisted, but still—like the woman of character that she was—constituting herself spokeswoman for the company, who, either overcome by the perfume, overawed by the presence of Monsieur Louis Auguier, or rendered speechless for the moment amid this gallery of horrors (I allude to the photographs on the walls), spoke not, nor even attempted to speak, she added—

“*Je comprend; cette parfoume passera. Vouillez me diah, maintenong—où sont les chambres à cioucher?*”

“Kindly tell me” (“*vouillez me diah*”) was this lady’s pet phrase, and one which all but invariably upset the gravity of her colleagues—a circumstance which in no wise disconcerted Miss Scollop, who, like many another true-born Briton, experienced such heartfelt pity for all foreigners, as, between ourselves, to be only too glad to see that, poor things, they were able to enjoy themselves at all.

Monsieur Louis Auguier led the way to the bedrooms.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MISS SCOLLOP DEEPLY OFFENDS MONSIEUR LOUIS AUGUIER.—
THE VIEW FROM MISS SCOLLOP’S WINDOW.

THE bedrooms at the Rose des Alpes were small, and were furnished with even more regard to economy than was the sitting-room. While the supply of the useful in them was limited, the ornamental element was altogether absent. To the horror of Miss Scollop, a *scrupulously* particular maiden-lady, the windows of the bedroom

chosen by her had, she observed, neither curtain, shutter, nor blind. Monsieur Louis Auguier all in vain drew her attention to the fact that, considering the height of the room and its outlook, there was no possibility of eyes intruding on her. In reply our modest countrywoman said nothing, but, opening an umbrella, found an ingenious mode of so fastening it to the window as to preclude even the chance of a passing bird's seeing in.

"I shall do this when I dress," she explained after a while.

"As you please, mademoiselle," said Monsieur Louis Auguier, with something like the ghost of a smile on his small, flat face.

Ill-fated Monsieur Louis! He had hardly left the room when Miss Scollop illustrated how fatally a man or woman may, unconsciously, transgress. Putting out her head at the door, she cried—

"GARÇON!"

It has very truly been said that every one has one "bad moment" in his life. This was the bad moment in the life of mine host of the Rose des Alpes, and I am thankful to be able to add that in it he acted, as in every other moment of his life, worthily of himself. Not that I mean to say he did not succumb for a moment. He did. Clutching hold of the bannisters with one hand to steady himself, while he smote his forehead, the seat of reason, temporarily benumbed, with the other, it was, yes, full sixty seconds before he felt himself man enough to speak again. And I challenge any one who has had a bad moment in his life (I just recall a few such in my own) to prove that he has recovered from its effects in less than this time.

At the expiration of sixty seconds, Monsieur Louis

Auguier did not *walk* certainly—why should one gloss over the truth?—but *tottered* to the room of Miss Scollop, and raising to hers his small, flat face, which seemed somehow to have become smaller and flatter than ever in that one moment, informed her that he was not called “*garçon*” in this establishment, but Monsieur Louis Auguier.

It is so seldom that one hears anything pleasant of English folk on the Continent that I have real pleasure in being able to say that, instead of glaring haughtily at the poor little man, Miss Scollop, with a smile all over her face, held out her hand, and, like the sweet, true-hearted Englishwoman that she was, was not above apologizing to Monsieur Louis Auguier.

“*Excusez-moi; j’avais oublié qu’on m’avait dit que vous étiez un ciourieux.*”

After which she returned to her window and gazed at the view, smiling, as well she might. Here an epitome of what she saw:

First of all, a strip of yard; in it two white-trousered cocks, looking mightily dandified as they heel and toe across the ground, ogling speckled hens. Above them, on a shed, two fat old doves, executing in elaborate style a pretty quadrille figure! none of your modern hops, but the good old stately dance—slowly advance, slowly retire, *chassez* to right and left, cross to each other’s places, *chassez* again. A curious sight in the broad daylight, but what can you expect from two fat old doves? If you want sobriety, look with Miss Scollop away from the poultry-yard into the field. The horses there only raise their brown heads from the grass to sniff the scented air, or to listen with pricked ears to far-off footfalls; while, as for the six mottled cows, they do not once look up or

move their patient feet, but graze as statuesquely as if they were made of marble. Oh, for little Bo-peep, or old Mother Goose, to enliven the scene! But we are not in England: witness yon herd of goats, leaping past and over each other, and looking, with their white beards, like so many demented old gentlemen. They are filling the air with the sound of tinkling bells; they are making straight for the mountain. Alas! they have never heard of Monsieur Serin, and of what befell his goats, when, do what he might, they too would make for the mountain.

Add to the sound of tinkling bells the sound of water—water running, oozing, trickling; and to these sounds and sights add other sights—the forest, the precipice, the glacier, the blasted tree, and the singed mountain-side (singed in a terrible storm); and to these add grasses, ferns, and flowers (not the Alp-rose, nor the furry edelweiss, for they grow higher), but bluebells, harebells—all the family of bells;—to these all manner of flying, creeping, singing, humming, chirping things; and to these the sun, the great, big, shining sun, shedding floods of glory upon everything, making the water in the brook more beautiful than silver, making of the snow upon the mountains fields of light.

All that is what Miss Scollop saw as she stood smiling at her window—that, and one thing more. Nay, was it possible? Did her old eyes not deceive her?

CHAPTER XXV.

“L'AUTRE” AND HIS MILKING-STOOL.—MONSIEUR LA MIE UNCONSCIOUSLY “SITS” FOR HIS PORTRAIT.

THE “one thing more” seen by Miss Scollop from her window, was nothing more nor less than a small boy; his

name—ah, there's the difficulty! Whereas the eldest son of mine hostess of the Rose des Alpes was called by both his Christian name and surname, the only other Auguier—and the small boy was he—was not called by any name at all.

Does your heart go out to grimy urchins? This urchin had a grimy face and grimy hands; he had sunny blue eyes and a shock of golden curls. He was sitting on a milking-stool when Miss Scollop first caught sight of him, with one grimy cheek leant on one grimy hand. He was looking straight into God's bright sun.

I repeat that I cannot say what was his name, for I never heard of his having any. He was commonly spoken of as "*Le fils de Madame Auguier, l'autre,*" this, perhaps, because such people as had inquired of mine hostess who he was, had received as invariable answer, "*Mon fils, l'autre.*" It was certainly a most striking instance of the overshadowing capacities of marked individuality; for of course there is no gainsaying that Monsieur Louis Auguier, with the mysterious impressiveness surrounding as with a garment his small, flat person, was a phenomenon, whereas there was absolutely nothing extraordinary about the urchin with the grimy face and sunny eyes, nothing which made him different from a thousand other grimy-faced, sunny-eyed urchins (our workaday world, thank God, is full of them), if one except the mention of one feature—and, truth to say, I almost feel like doing so—so scandalized at sight thereof was my countrywoman, Miss Scollop; and yet, on the other hand, there is something mean in working up the curiosity of the reader, to leave him in the dark.

The boy, it has been said, was sitting on a milking-stool. Well, the curious feature was that, when he rose,

the milking-stool rose with him, and—evidently inseparable, like the pigtail of which a German poet tells us—“whatever turn its owner took, remained behind.”

This was the thing that caused Miss Scollop to ask herself, Was it possible? Did her old eyes not deceive her? While she was still looking at the boy, the latter was joined by no less a person than Monsieur la Mie, and with him set out on a walk across the fields. Now, the aim of this gentleman, in strolling forth with the younger son of Madame Auguier, not being, I grieve to say, to study childhood or enlighten youth, but simply to discuss with the most convenient person matters of interest to the most interesting man of his acquaintance—to wit, himself,—I vote we follow them.

“Le fils de Madame Auguier, *l'autre*,” was the grand link between the Rose des Alpes and the Edelweiss. While Madame Auguier and Frau Metzle were not on bowing terms; while Monsieur Louis Auguier and Frau Metzle barely exchanged civilities;—it would have been hard to say in which boarding-house Auguier junior was more popular. In face of him factions collapsed and party-spirit died out; not that he ran with the hounds and the hare, but the hounds and the hare ran with him. If any one wanted a guide at either boarding-house, it was he who was taken; if any one wanted a bunch of Alp-roses or of Edelweiss, it was he who was sent for it; if any one had a message for Bex, it was he who took it; if any one wanted a Swiss song, it was he who was called on to sing it;—nay, if any one, painting, wanted a figure to throw into a landscape, it was he and his milking-stool that were thrown in. It was typical of his neutral position, and the calmness with which he as-

sented it, that on the day on which workmen from Bex had arrived, with all their paraphernalia of ladders and paint, to put a new coating of green on the time-stained shutters of the Rose des Alpes—a proceeding which had caused Frau Metzle to feel “that sick” for hours that she had hardly known whether she was on her head or her heels—even on that day Auguier junior had gone to and fro between the two inns with his accustomed freedom. Such being the position he took, it was surely natural that when visitors at the Rose des Alpes felt desirous of knowing aught concerning visitors at the Edelweiss, and *vice versâ*, they should for the purpose have pitched on Auguier junior. Equally natural was it that when one gentleman at the Edelweiss fell more or less in love with all the ladies of that establishment and at the Rose des Alpes, and when all the ladies at the Rose des Alpes and at the Edelweiss fell more or less in love with one gentleman at the latter establishment—equally natural was it, then, that there should be a raid made on the younger Auguier, who alone had, so to speak, the run of both houses.

With him, as has been said, Monsieur la Mie sallied forth. As yet he had not spoken, and, indeed, his situation was an embarrassing one. There are few things more hard than to open gracefully a conversation which you wish to turn on matters mainly interesting to yourself. Monsieur la Mie had set out on this walk with the intention of engaging the younger Auguier in a discourse on the thirteen ladies staying at the Rose des Alpes, more especially on, say, six of their number; most especially on *one* of that select six. Well, in face of the extreme griminess of the boy, and the decided lack of sentiment in his eye, a man of the Professor's finely developed

powers of observation could not but know that to draw him out on such a subject would necessitate the exercise of much tact. He looked at the youngster's profile, as he trotted beside him. It was not a promising one; the nose especially was of that type denoting unlimited impishness.

I have never tried to idealize Monsieur la Mie. I have said repeatedly that he was a man of genius, *lacking talent*. He confessed this himself with the same admirable modesty as that shown by Themistocles in his confession that he could make of a small city a great one, but could not play on the flute. Perhaps the resemblance between the Athenian statesman and the Swiss philosopher was never greater than at this moment. Figuratively speaking, as Monsieur la Mie and Auguier junior sallied forth, it was, indeed, not a matter of making of a small city a great one, but of playing on the flute. And the Professor failed signally. The Author-to-be of the Work-to-be that was to startle the world, having stolen a number of peeps at the grimy face beside him, found that, rack his brains as he might, he could think of no way of opening with the owner thereof a conversation on the subject of the ladies.

So the two went on without speaking.

"Supposing we sit down here," said the boy at last; and, suiting the action to the word, sat down on the mountain-side on his milking-stool.

It is a curious feature, which perhaps you may have observed, that they who carry milking-stools attached to their persons invariably forget that there are other mortals not similarly equipped. Monsieur la Mie smiled pensively as for the first time this feature struck him; then, being a man of resources no less than of thought, spread his handkerchief on the ground and seated himself thereon, opposite to the urchin on the milking-stool.

Now, it is odd how a stool, be it small as it may, gives height to the sitting figure; equally strange how a man, be he tall as he may, seems to sink into insignificance when seated on the level ground.

"What are you gazing at?" asked the Professor, seeing his companion's attention suddenly attracted.

The boy pointed beyond him with a grin, that brought his dazzling white teeth into startling contrast with his crimson lips, that lit up his little dark face much as the sun lit up his ragged golden hair.

"Don't you see? At her! The lady's *photographing* you."

And here, with a true boy's howl of delight, Auguier junior performed a somersault, no easy matter, considering his wooden appendage.

"*Me! Who?*"

The Professor turned; alas, too late!

Having seen the finger of exposure pointed at her, "the lady" (by all the elves and all the imps, none other than Marie Minard) had closed her sketch-book and had fled.

Such was the ignominy attending the first stage in the Professor's walk. Unconsciously he had "sat" for his likeness. He was not a whit wiser concerning the doings of the ladies at the Rose des Alpes than when he had started, and the person from whom he had meant to gain enlightenment, this unapproachable urchin, Auguier junior, having, after a series of tumbles, gained his physical equilibrium, was doing his best to establish the mental, as he sat facing the Professor, looking to the latter's heated imagination more like a small gnome than anything human.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAN AND URCHIN.

IF one may envy childhood one thing more than another, it is its privilege to stare. While the discomfited Professor would have liked, if possible, to have hidden himself away in his own pocket, young Auguier, with his grimy hands spread on his knees, calmly eyed him; then, with childhood's happy knack of saying the right thing at the right time, remarked cheerfully—

“Funny one, she, eh? Suppose it took her fancy, you and me sitting here. Always sees the joke in things. Made a picture of my brother, Monsieur Louis, once. Didn't know I saw it, but I did. Made me choke with laughter.”

And a gurgle of amusement at the mere reminiscence, proved to the Professor that here was no exaggeration. This was cheering:—he (François la Mie) coupled with the little flat-faced owner of the *Rose des Alpes* in the honour of being caricatured! Monsieur la Mie was not cruel by nature; his bitterest enemy could not have called him hard-hearted; but it would at this moment have given him inexpressible pleasure to be able to hoist Auguier junior and his milking-stool to the topmost ridge of Mont Blanc. “The highest refinement of the malevolent gratification,” says a living scientist, whose stately if somewhat polysyllabic sentences it is edifying to read, “is the emotion called the ludicrous or the comic.” Certes, Auguier junior knew nothing of malevolence, yet more ludicrous, more comic, he could not have made the Professor appear, had all the imps of malice been at work in him. Monsieur la Mie looked at his face, and, irate though he was inwardly, was forced to admit

that it was as pleasant an urchin's face as you could see, with not one touch of ill-will in it.

"Do you ever speak to Mademoiselle Minard?" he asked the child.

"Don't I!"—with gusto. Then, looking up artlessly, "Do *you?*"

A blow on the eye will make a man see a thousand stars, say some. What Monsieur la Mie saw I will not pretend to know, but he certainly received a very severe blow.

"Suppose you do," continued the boy, undismayed, and talking to himself as much as to any one else, "for she talks of you; all of them talk of you"—confidentially.

"Indeed?"—It was a pleasant feature in Monsieur la Mie's character that, if easily cast down, he was equally easily buoyed up again; that, if his motto was at one moment, "*Que peu de chose est la vie humaine*," none the less was he ready to sing in the next, "*Vive la vie!*"

He smiled. The ladies talked of him, did they?

"Yes; not one but talks of you," added the boy, pursuing this happy vein, while he scanned the Professor's face with the pertinacity of youth, as if at some loss to discover in what lay his peculiar charm. "Something taking in folks, I suppose. All our girls talk of Monsieur Louis."

The Professor looked up, stupefied. It has been said that, kind-hearted man though he was, there had been a point in the dialogue at which, had he been able to do so, it would have given him boundless pleasure to hoist Auguier junior to the topmost ridge of Mont Blanc. At this moment, in which for the second time the urchin was pleased to couple him, and, on this occasion, in his captivating capacities, with that indescribably absurd

individual, his brother, it would have given the Professor untold glee to hurl him and his milking-stool into bottomless space.

"Supposing we set out home," suggested the child, finding, perhaps that his attempts at conversation were rather coolly received, though blissfully unconscious of their actual effect on the gentleman opposite him.

"Supposing we do," replied the Professor in a muffled voice, the pathos of which would have probably struck any one but a grimy boy—"supposing we do;" and he rose slowly, and with every appearance of difficulty, result of the outer man's being stiff with sitting on the ground, and the inner man's being—— But let me spare harrowing details. "*Supposing we do,*" he repeated, as though it were the burden of some tragic song, as he limped down-hill behind the youngster, who, with great alacrity, was making less and less the space between him and the Rose des Alpes.

Assuredly no man had ever set out on a trip destined to end more dismally.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MONSIEUR LA MIE RAISES HIS HAT.—THE LUSCOMBE-BINNSSES.

"How do you do, Miss Luscombe-Binns?"

This was at the foot of the hill, where Monsieur la Mie and Auguier junior parted. As he spoke, the Professor raised his hat. Here, be it said, that it is to Frenchmen a curious and incomprehensible thing how few Englishmen seem aware that the art of raising the hat is one which, like every other, may be cultivated in two ways: the virtuoso and the amateur,—the former being that which obtains in France, and, indeed, all over

the Continent; the latter that which prevails in the British Isles. The secret of this, a Frenchman once assured me, is that Englishmen as a body (he was good enough to admit there were some exceptions) do not realize what profound study, what patient practice the art requires. Could they, he said, but bring themselves to reflect, as do other nations, that each time they salute they have to control the shoulder, to pose the elbow, to curve the wrist, and flute the fingers, what a reproach might Britannia be spared!

This Frenchman was—Monsieur la Mie. And well might he speak with authority on the subject. I append a few of the comments evoked by himself in this matter:—

Miss Peachum: "To see Monsieur la Mie raise his hat is a dream."

Miss Macnab: "A poem!"

Miss Luscombe-Binns: "Darling man! it bring tears to my eyes."

Could any one but a Frenchman boast of calling forth remarks like this by an act so trivial?

To say that Miss Luscombe-Binns, on the present occasion, looked admiringly at Monsieur la Mie would be going too far. Miss Luscombe-Binns was far too maidenly to do anything of the kind. She timidly returned the glance of the Professor, and blushed.

And now, of course, the reader wants to know, Who was Miss Luscombe-Binns? Miss Luscombe-Binns, otherwise Ottilie Luscombe-Binns, was one of a family of six staying at the Edelweiss, and, as she and her family will act a certain part in this history of a truly motley company, they may as well be described here.

First, there was Mr. Luscombe-Binns, a small, thin

man, with that look in his face which seems to say to all the world, "I'll be good; please don't beat me;" a man with a general air of apologizing for his own existence; who never entered a room without saying, regardless of grammar, but with infinite pathos, "It's me;" and a glance at whom was sufficient to show you, after the first introduction to him and his wife, that, while he was the Binns, she was the Luscombe, and this was, moreover, a fact which was impressed on him every day of his life. So, indeed, it was, though "the wooing o't" had been as follows:—

From his earliest youth John Binns had been affected with that strange malady called amnesia, which causes a man to say whatever he does not mean, and ask for whatever he does not want. Thus, when at table he needed the salt, Mr. Binns would ask for his walking-stick; and thus, when on one occasion he happened to be escorting Miss Luscombe home from a concert, merely meaning to ask her to accept his arm, he asked her (this, I think, the most extraordinary case of the malady of which I have ever heard) would she accept his heart? Miss Luscombe at once said, "Yes, if dear papa will allow it;" and dear papa not only allowed it, but insisted on it.

And so they were married. I never heard of a similar case of courtship, but make no doubt it is not unprecedented.

Oddly enough, ready as Mrs. Binns had been as Miss Luscombe to change her name, she was most desirous after marriage to keep before the world the fact that she *had*, in her day, been a Luscombe, and that "John" was responsible for the Binns. "Yes, responsible," she would say severely, looking at the unhappy owner of the

monosyllable with all the scorn that the owner of a dissyllable might be expected to feel. She was a dark woman, with (for a woman) a rather heavy moustache, and the expression commonly worn by people who are tasting something—that look which you may have noticed in persons when trying critically the flavour of some edible before committing themselves to the purchase thereof. As a passing expression, it is peculiar; when it becomes chronic, it is one of the most uncanny of which the human physiognomy admits.

Curiously unlike her mother was Miss Luscombe-Binns, Ottilie, or, as she more often was called, Otty, and as—besides being one of the many young lady admirers of Monsieur la Mie—she was a remarkable instance of a type considered peculiarly English on the Continent, I shall describe her fully. Miss Luscombe-Binns had yellow hair, which she wore in a potatolike clump behind; an oval face and oval eyes; nose and mouth of the mouse type; finny hands, and long, flat feet. The effect of all these characteristics was not ameliorated by taste in the matter of dress. I do not describe dress in a general way, and should be sorry to lay down the law in a matter so subtle; but certain combinations of colour, certain lines of drapery, a loose cloth-waistband about an ungainly figure, and a fur pelerine worn far into summer, are things which make one feel what certain Americans call “kinder queer.” As for poor Otty’s carriage, Monsieur la Mie was wont to declare that, what with the stiff immobility of her head and the graceless, spasmodic motion of her limbs—“like many young Englishwomen”—she reminded him of nothing so much as of those cardboard figures, which, whilst ingeniously fitted out with knee-joints and elbow-joints, none the less in their movements ludicrously

suggest the pulling of a string. That "many young Englishwomen" of this type are to be met with abroad is undeniable; equally true is it that most of our countrywomen who settle down on the Continent seem bent (why one cannot tell) to uphold the belief, by their example, that as a nation we commonly sit with our feet in the first position, our elbows protruding behind, and the faces of so many ladies and knights of the rueful countenance. Poor Otty! Habitually heavy and wooden, she had a fashion when wishing especially to please, of throwing herself on the floor in the attitude of devotion, most often before her mother, whom she called (this, one hopes, unusual), "Sweet one."

The fourth figure in this family group was Juan, the eldest son. (Notice the euphemizing of his father's Christian name.) This individual was a tall, slim youth, not peculiarly English looking, but one of those young men to be met the wide world over, with the chronic expression of a person just about to sneeze; with pale hair; pensive blue eyes; and a mouth, like the throat of a certain queen, "small—very small indeed." As in part accounting for the expression above noted, it should be stated, perhaps, that Juan Binns suffered from an affection of the voice that caused him to speak in that tone which commonly indicates severe influenza. He was poetical; had, when raised to singing pitch, what servant-maids not inexpressively call "a sweet-pretty" voice; and sang with success the songs of his pet poet, whom he called "Tobby Booah."

If beauty could not be said to find representatives in the four elder members of this family, it must be admitted that in the two children it was more than fairly typified. To the class of juveniles known as "trying," the little

Luscombe-Binnses did not belong, both master and missie being abnormally, mournfully good. They commonly went about hand-in-hand, which astounded Monsieur la Mie, and greatly pleased mamma. They learnt a text, and said it at the breakfast-table, to the amazement of Monsieur la Mie, before taking breakfast; the boy (this a peculiarly dismal feature) showing a preference for the longest possible texts, and more than once saying two, which stupefied Monsieur la Mie, and mightily pleased mamma. They were pretty, as (Heaven bless them!) most English children are, with a prettiness which set the Professor asking, as some aggravating people will ask, "From where did it come? Neither father nor mother have it;"—as if it were not a fact which by this time pretty well every one should know, that healthy children all over the earth have a prettiness of their own, totally irrespective of father and mother—a prettiness of pink and white complexion, of rounded lips and big eyes, of sturdy legs and chubby arms, of milky necks and pearly teeth; of smiles, of tears, of frowns, of pouts; of sulks, of somersaults; of glances asking, "What do you mean?" and glances saying, "We know more than you fancy;" of saucy peeps and shy peeps; of merry looks-up and guilty looks-down; of tumbled frocks and crumbled socks; of sashes, pinafores, and curls; of shoes and sleeve knots; of tuckers, puckers, dimples, wrinkles, twinkles—of a thousand and one pretty things, concerning which one is tempted to ask, once for all, "In the name of common sense, how can folks expect to find them in fathers and mothers?"

All these and a dozen more things made of the little Luscombe-Binnses pretty children. Alas, that they should have been so abnormally, mournfully good—especially the boy. The texts to which allusion has been made, he

would intone so finely, and then, with so ethereal, so seraphic an expression, would partake of breakfast (mother always gave him the best of everything, because he was so sweet a little boy), that it needed no vast stretch of the imagination to see into his future. As for the little maid, his sister, it must be said that she had about her more of earth; and had she not, for prudential reasons, and by the example of her brother, the cherub, been led to assume an air of preternatural goodness, there is reason to believe that she would not have been incapable of committing more often than she did, one or other of those infantile iniquities which come under the general heading of "pranks." What mainly leads me to make this remark is the remembrance of the circumstance that she, in contradistinction to the cherub, learned the shortest possible texts, and had that in her blue eyes which seemed to disapprove of the cherub's getting the best of everything morning after morning, because, unlike her, he learned double quantity, and when it came to saying his part, did so with such exceeding unction. Thus much for the individual members of the family.

At the time here under discussion, the Luscombe-Binnses, one and all, were in deep mourning; and thereby hangs a tale almost as strange as that by poor John Binns's courtship.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHY THE LUSCOMBE-BINNSSES WERE IN MOURNING.—MARGERY
A "FIDDLE."

ONE hears of people going down the street to meet a cloud, but very few people, in point of fact, lay in a stock of premature mourning, This is what Mrs. Luscombe-

Binns had done, and that is why she and her family were all in black. Some fortnight before the time of their putting up at Les Plans, the life of Mr. Binns, senior, then in Geneva, had been despaired of. Three doctors had agreed on the subject, and one of them, on breaking to Mrs. Binns the melancholy fact of her husband's approaching dissolution, had besought her to bear up, and insisted that she should take an airing; for, to do her justice, the lady had watched by the couch of her husband for three nights running.

Mrs. Binns was prevailed upon to sally forth. Perhaps you know the Rue du Rhone in Geneva. In a mourning ware-house of this street the distracted lady beheld an announcement as follows:—

“Last day of sale. Prices fabulously reduced.” You divine the rest.

I, for my part, see nothing reprehensible in the fact that, with a slight modification, what was said of John Gilpin's spouse might here be said of the wife of Mr. Binns:

“Although she was on sorrow bent,
She had a frugal mind.”

On the other hand, one cannot help feeling with the sick man, who, on picking himself up in despite of the three doctors (the one act of downright defiance which is traceable to the paternal Binns), found his family all in mourning garb; for—promptness being a notable feature in Mrs. Luscombe-Binns—that lady had no sooner purchased the material, than she made arrangements to have it “made up.” The next thing which had to be made up being a plausible story to account for the phenomenon of the family's dress, a rumour was spread of the death in America of a dear relation. Alas, poor Mr.

Binns knew better! With a mourning band round his hat for himself (for "You would not have your whole family seen in mourning, and yourself not put on a mourning band, I suppose, Mr. Binns?" his wife had said sharply), in sheer depression he had once hazarded a feeble joke on the subject, but had been speedily silenced by a volley of scathing remarks from Mrs. Binns, who was not one of your ladies to stand banter, even the mildest, on any subject whatever.

Besides the curious fact of this family's all being in mourning for a living relation, may be mentioned the circumstance that they were never seen without alpenstocks. They brought them to breakfast, to dinner, to supper; they moved not a step without them all day long; it was darkly rumoured that they took them to bed with them at night.

Miss Luscombe-Binns had an alpenstock in her hand when she met Monsieur la Mie, and that brings us back to the point from which we started. Monsieur la Mie raised his hat, and Miss Luscombe-Binns blushed.

"How do you do, Miss Luscombe-Beans?"

"There, you naughty man! How often have I told you that I am *not* a vegetable?"

As she spoke, Miss Luscombe-Binns tried to give her alpenstock a waggish little shake, but failed, which was not unnatural, considering the size and unwieldy nature of that implement.

The Professor laughed. "A vegetable?" he said. "Always your little joke at my expense. To be sure, not Beans, but *B'nns*" (curiously emphasizing the labial, and trying hard to leap from it to the *n*)—"B'nns. I will practise saying *B'nns*."

"Oh, horrible!" Miss Binns put her hands on her ears, while the Professor caught her falling alpenstock. "Binns! Binns! Do stop. If you knew how I hate the name"—blushing; "I do really. I don't think I ever have a happy moment but it is marred by the thought that my name is that wretched monosyllable. I never feel passing pleasure but it comes upon me like a blow: *my name is Binns*. What would you do in my place?"

Again the Professor smiled. "I should have recourse to the *ultima ratio*, perhaps, and marry."

"Ah, I don't understand French, Professor. My alpenstock, please. I am on my way to the post. Are you?"

"Unhappily, no. My mother expects me. *Au revoir*." And this dutiful Professor, foregoing the rapture of a walk with a lady who is *not a vegetable*, raises his hat and bends his steps homeward. As he passes an arbour in the garden he hears high voices. "More of these Luscombe-Binnses," he says, half aloud. He is right. This time it is the children.

"You said your prayers in bed last night, Mervy."

"I didn't!"

"You did!"

"I d-i-d-n-'t!"

"You d-i-d; and I'll tell mother!"

"You won't!"

"I will!"

"You——"

The rest is drowned in the clash of alpenstocks. Positively, yes, those small saints, Mervyn and Margery, are cudgelling each other in the cause of religion. The Professor, hidden behind the foliage, waits for the situation to develop.

The boy is the first to throw his stick away. "There

Margery, say you won't tell." Poor cherub! He speaks half under his breath, piteously. It was hard to have passed all his life of seven years for a phenomenon, superior to the slightest frailty that boys, regarded as flesh, are mostly supposed to be heir to, and for that length of time, with one exception, to have made a point of saying night after night his prayers aloud, with notable distinctness, kneeling in mystical white raiment beside his bed, with for admiring audience mother and small sister; it was hard, after this, to have the one exception thrown into his face, more especially as Margery was pleased to add that this one exception was the result of mother's having announced, as mother had done, that on this special evening she could not pay her usual nocturnal visit to her darling's room. The cherub himself felt this told against him, and dreaded the ignominy of exposure.

"Come, Margery," he said, "say you won't tell *this once*."

Margery melted and said she wouldn't on one condition—that *she* might say her prayers in bed *for a whole month* without its being told.

"*I* like to say my prayers in bed," she wound up, in hideous defiance of orthodoxy.

The cherub fairly gasped. The proposal, besides showing a depth of iniquity at which he would have dearly liked to turn up his blue eyes, was so manifestly to Margery's advantage. Conceive the luxury of saying your prayers in bed for thirty nights running! And yet, desirous as he was to keep up his own unimpeachable character, he saw no loophole of escape. Having stipulated for her pound of flesh, Margery twirled her pink thumbs and looked as like a Shylock as a bewitchingly pretty small maiden of six could look. Under a month's *carte blanche* to say her prayers curled up in bed, she would not forego

the delight of denouncing this superlatively virtuous brother of hers.

"Did you say a *month*, Margery?" asked the prodigy, who, for once in his life, *only once*—but that, alas! under such suspicious circumstances—had so far yielded to the weakness of the flesh as to neglect the proper genuflection.

"Yes, a *monf*."

When desiring most to be impressive, Margery was apt to slip over a *th*; but she spoke with a notable increase of the expression before alluded to, as evinced in the tight pursing-up of cherry lips, and a toss of golden curls, which said, if you chose to put them into words, "I stand here on my bond."

"A *monf*," she repeated, with weird emphasis.

The cherub looked at her; then bursting into holy ire, exclaimed, "You're a heretic, and a pagan, and a—a fiddle!"

Dismayed for a moment by this burst of abuse, Margery stopped in the midst of twirling her thumbs, but soon took heart again; and ere the children left the arbour she had gained her point. The Professor with new interest watched them go towards the house, and was about to follow them, when an unmistakable "stump" followed by an unmistakable voice, made him wish too late that he had indeed hurried home to his mother.

The lady who was *not a vegetable* smiled her brightest at him.

"Home again and out again *so soon*, Professor? What do you think of that sky?"

"We shall have rain to-morrow."

He was right. Next day it rained.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RAIN, ENGLISH AND FOREIGN.—THE PROFESSOR'S EXPERIENCE
AT BATH.—RAINED?—IT POURED.

"SMALL, compact, pitiless"—so a Frenchman has described English rain—"looking at it, one can see no reason why it should not continue to the end of time."

Possibly; on the other hand, equally curious to the Briton is the rain with which one meets abroad—rain that comes down in pailfuls, as often as not in face of, in defiance of, the sun that looks on for a while with a kind of nonplussed expression, then flashes forth as though with the intention of asserting itself—too late. Down come the pailfuls as before.

Give me our calm, go-it English rain. One is prepared for showers in this land of ours where, if our neighbours be right, the weather is habitually glum, with but a shade of more or less glumness as the seasons change; where, as Monsieur Taine discovered, the air is always charged with damp clouds, floating watering-pots which dissolve every quarter of an hour. Who but thinks of Smollet's hero, Matthew Bramble, in the Downs—a victim "to demons that descended in a perpetual drizzle?"

In such a land as this, even a Frenchman surely should be prepared for rain; but abroad! The sky is always bright abroad. One no sooner crosses the Channel than the heavens are kind, and the sun beams down on one with all the benignity of a good-natured old paterfamilias. Drizzles? Floating watering-pots on the verge of dissolution? These here, one feels at once, are things unknown. We are, of course, in realms where it never rains, and anathematize ourselves for having brought from Matthew Bramble's island, ulsters, gamp, and galoshes.

Suddenly—is it possible?—a drop on your nose (mind, it is not April); another; yet another; more and more—with the sun looking on! No, this is too ridiculous; too inconsiderate! With no warning whatever (give me the floating watering-pots!), the clouds, come from you know not where, you know not when, thicken with incredible quickness, overcast the whole sky; and before you have had time to turn up your coat-collar and open an umbrella, down come the pailfuls, with a force against which no portable silken canopy that ever yet was invented could battle.

So much for rain out of England. So much for the kind of rain that befell our sojourners at Les Plans, and, after the manner of rain the wide world over, brought out in a more or less curious way the character of each and every individual staying at either inn. As bearing on this statement concerning the effect of rain on the human mind, I append a story, the truth of which is vouched for by its narrator, Monsieur la Mie.

During a sojourn some years ago in that “vastly pretty city,” Bath, the Professor was overtaken by rain (the month was April) on Beechen Cliff, without ulster or umbrella. In this plight, he took refuge under a tree, commanding a view of the city of steaming fountains, where in course of time he was joined by a man—short, thick-set, bronzed, with the rain on his clothes and face—one of those sons of Adam, born, one tells one’s self at a glance, like primeval man, to delve. This individual, after standing for a full minute gazing stolidly, as it seemed to the Swiss savant, at a speck in vacancy, said, giving the queen’s English one of those piquant turns which one is tempted to hope with the Professor the education of the masses will never succeed in banishing—

"I be caught in the rain."

Well, though clothed in picturesque English, the circumstance appeared to Monsieur la Mie so patent that he could only turn round with a look of amazement that his neighbour should think it necessary to draw attention to it. The latter returned his gaze with the smallest diminution possible in the stolid expression already mentioned, then added, impressively—

"So be you."

At this the surprise of our hero knew no bounds. If in truth the first circumstance had appeared self-evident enough to need no commenting on it, the second was so palpable as to make commenting on it to be accounted for only on the assumption that the man was mad. He stole a second peep at him. No sign of mental aberration. The rustic's eye was again fixed on space, with a pensive expression; his lips were pursed in a way that showed that the thought was not unpleasing.

Monsieur la Mie mentally repeated his words, "I be caught in the rain; *so be you*," and, he declares, it suddenly flashed on him that his neighbour was in a state of pleased emotion, making it impossible for him to contain his feelings; that, having the consciousness that, while the brim of his hat was full of water, the brim of that of a fellow-being was overflowing; that while the rain trickled down his back, it streamed down the back of another, was so uncommonly consoling, nay, exhilarating, that, taciturn though he was by nature, he had felt, find some vent for his feelings he must. "And, you know, his delight was, after all, very natural," the Professor ended his story. Perhaps it was; perhaps most mortals are at heart like that man at Bath. Certain it is that what made our good people at Les Plans not altogether

succumb to the miseries of their situation—for it was no small trial being held captive in two small inns on one small speck of a small and primitive spot, for a long summer's day—what mainly upheld their spirits in this dilemma was that the inmates of each boarding-house had the consciousness that those of the other suffered as did they; that the Rose des Alpes, so to speak, as it felt the rain plashing against its green shutters, had it had a tongue, could have said to the Edelweiss, the very words said by the man at Bath to Monsieur la Mie—"I be caught in the rain; *so be you*;" and the Edelweiss, given similar powers of speech, could have answered with the same taunt.

Such as it was, cold comfort enough it proved, and many and—by more than one of the tourists, never to be forgotten—were the events and disasters of this day.

CHAPTER XXX.

BEAUTY'S TRIUMPH.—QUESTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE RAIN.—
MISS MACNAB'S HAT.

TIME, by all that is prosy, once more eight o'clock a.m.

"How it does pour!" said Monsieur la Mie, for something like the third time in a period covering some quarter of an hour, as he looked out on a landscape that, truth to say, greatly resembled one of Miss Macnab's blurred sepia paintings. Ordinary mortals under similar circumstances have been known to make the same speech no less than six times in the same number of minutes; but Monsieur la Mie, as set forth at the outset of this work, was not of such.

Eugénie Roland had alone as yet made her appearance in the breakfast-room; for, though they professed

to breakfast at eight o'clock at the Edelweiss, the company rarely appeared before 8.30. It may as well here, perhaps, be said that Eugénie Roland's ankles had stood the test of a leap described some pages back. She had entered the breakfast-room simultaneously with the Professor, and now took it upon herself to prevent the latter from repeating a remark which, however natural in face of the actual state of the weather, became uninteresting, not to say wearisome, after the first time of hearing.

"I have a dim feeling," she said demurely, "that you have said those words before, and"—she looked up at him gravely, yet with a suggestion of coming twinkles—"a horrible foreboding that you may think it necessary to repeat them."

The Professor winced.

You may say to almost any one that he or she has certain grand failings, but the suggestion conveyed, however mildly, however playfully, that he or she is a bore, is more than human beings can stand. There is—a thing though it be which passeth all understanding—an ignominy attached to being told that one repeats one's self which dwarfs into insignificance the shame which one might feel at being accused of breaking the ten commandments.

The Professor more than winced; he scowled.

"*Allons donc!* What have I said?" Eugénie clasped her hands. "You look as sulky as an Englishman, *mon maître*. By the way, that nation can't be half bad at heart, to be as bearable as it is, and it exposed to chronic rain like this. What think you?"

"Is it possible the weather has made you speculative?" asked the Professor, dryly.

"*Mon Dieu!*"—laughing. "Thoughtfulness, if that

is what you mean, is infectious, and you have been in a brown study this quarter of an hour. What questions may the rain have suggested to you, my master?"

"More than I could count on my fingers. Suppose I name the first." He drops into her quasi-solemn tone. "Looking at the barometer, I ask myself—How will Mademoiselle Roland take this rain?"

"Perhaps I can tell you." The girl laughs—that grating laugh that shows her cruel teeth. "If I know her right at all, Mademoiselle Roland will follow the example of Die Peachum and her father. If it rains like this much longer she will harangue the elements as follows:—'I don't like it; don't want it; I WON'T HAVE IT!'"

"And if, as is just possible, the elements grant her no ear?"

"Then? Why then, monsieur, like Die, Mademoiselle Roland will sit down on the floor, stretch out her feet, and scream, 'comme un beau diable.' Most inquisitive of men, are you now satisfied?"

The Professor bowed so low and with a courtesy so solemn that it might have brought a blush to the cheek before him. But Eugénie was equal to him.

"*Ma foi!*" she exclaimed, "you have not forgotten your dancing-lessons; neither have I;" and with mock gravity she made a sweeping curtsey, bewitchingly pretty. What will you? It were odd if with tiny feet, and a figure of perfect grace, with a head in a frame of gold and a face of faultless outline, with a beauty of blue eyes and crimson lips, of long lashes and changeful colour—it were odd if, with all this, Eugénie Roland should fail to entrance for a moment.

François la Mie's face changed. His philosophy on

the subject of brainless women took wings. He bent towards the radiant girl.

"Eugénie!" (what right had he to call her Eugénie?) "are you a witch?"

It was Beauty's triumph. Stay! By some fatality, the Professor had no sooner said the words, and been answered by a laugh, than he felt that other eyes were fixed on him; then he turned and met the eyes of—Margaret Winkelried.

When had she entered, and how long had she been on that sofa? Had she heard his words to Eugénie? Her eyes were full of mournfulness. Had she—— Not caring even to complete the thought, the Professor felt something so like a small prick of conscience as to make him knit his brows for a full half-minute, and feel uncommonly vexed with François la Mie for that space of time.

"Well, well! Question number one is answered; now for number two," said Eugénie, not displeased at the embarrassment she had caused, and seating herself on the sofa at the feet of Margaret.

François la Mie drew a chair to their side. He did not speak.

"Question number two. Make haste, *mon maître*," repeated Eugénie, using the form of address which at this time, she declared, showed her dutiful feelings towards her late tutor. Then she too relapsed into silence and the contemplation of one little foot, or, rather, of one little French shoe, the heel of which she had coquettishly placed on the toe of the other.

"The question?" laughed the Professor, as he looked from one girl to the other, at the little French shoes, and, finally, towards the other end of the room, where Margery and Mervyn Binns were standing at a window.

"Yes, the question! the question!" cried Eugénie.

"All in time, Miss Impatience. Here you are! A dive into natural phenomena! How do you account for the preponderance of good noses in a land of perpetual rain, where the impulse of every child is, as soon as it showers, to flatten his or her nose against a window-pane? All is fair in fun and war. *The answer! the answer!*" and he imitates Eugénie's tone of impatience.

This time Margaret laughs. She has a pretty laugh, low and sweet and catching. Listening to it, Eugénie taps the floor with her French heels.

Nothing further is said for awhile. The children still stand pressed against the window. Any one outside, with power to read thought in little flattened faces, could have read on that of Margery no small misery, mixed with self-reproach. Ah, those prayers said last night cuddled up in bed! alas, alas! that iniquitous arrangement concerning the "monf"! Who was to blame for this weather but herself? The very elements are swayed by the sins of commission and omission of a little English maid of six. Well-a-day! Up swell the tears and flood the big blue eyes; then, tumbling over one another, fall on the round cheeks pressed against the pane, and there lodge, until François la Mie, stepping on tiptoe from behind and taking between his hands the little head, down they pour, a murky stream, with the dust from the window-pane in it.

"Where are my darlings?" says a voice from the breakfast-room door.

In a moment the faces of both children change. The scowl, the tears, have disappeared, and hand-in-hand they answer the call, with that look of abnormal goodness to which allusion has already been made.

"There's a chapter to add to your 'Natural Phenomena,' Professor," says Margaret, archly, as, rising, she prepares to limp after the children to the breakfast-table. "Thank you"—she takes his proffered arm—"I am still horribly lame."

Eugénie follows, with her white teeth set. Only by degrees and as the breakfast-room fills does she somewhat recover her temper.

"I begin to feel," she says to Monsieur la Mie across the table, "the day will not be altogether dull. There's a question that has suggested itself to me in face of this change in the weather. Will or will not our fair Caledonian appear as usual in her irresistible hat, because"—striking an attitude and imitating the "Caledonian's" accent—"we *do*, after all, Professor, spend the greater part of our day out-of-doors?"

"*Mais*, Eugénie!" The reproof comes from her mother, and is ignored.

The "fair Caledonian" was Miss Macnab, who was, by unanimous consent, the owner of the prettiest thing in hats at Les Plans. I shall not attempt to give a full description of the article, because I never could describe any article of clothing in my life. Suffice it to remark that it was white, with a large brim—*belle jardinière*, I fancy this shape is called—and trimmed with tulle in a way styled by milliners "chaste." The ladies at Les Plans had one and all pronounced it perfection. They had also one and all remarked what extremely bad taste it was in Miss Macnab to wear so charming a headgear, well as it might, and no doubt would, have become each or any of them. In this opinion Miss Macnab, needless to say, did not concur. She put the hat on before breakfast every morning; and during her stay at Les

Plans, up to this day of rain, had rarely been seen without it from dawn to dusk. That Eugénie should wonder would she or would she not appear in it to-day, in face of the change of the weather, was not unnatural; but it certainly was unnatural that she should put the question aloud to the Professor in a room so little private as any one might suppose a boarding-house breakfast-room to be. As it was, she had scarcely finished speaking—nay, was still in the posture in which she had mimicked the lady who piqued herself on “form,” still had her mouth pursed up to suit the tone in which she had not inaptly reproduced that lady’s style of speech (the style suggesting “stewed prunes”), when past her walked the butt of her ridicule, Miss Macnab herself—in *the hat*—with her figure drawn to its fullest height, and in its conscious slimness reminding one more than ever of that graceful insect, the wasp; with her upper lip raised at the left side, the gesture of which she herself had said, “So we Macnabs smile at our enemies;” and with that, in short, in her presence, from the crown of her *belle jardinière* to the sole of her Oxford shoe, that caused the smile on the face of Eugénie Roland to fade as quickly as it had come. Not that she felt with the Scotchwoman—this pretty soulless creature never felt with any one—but she dreaded malice, as a butterfly dreads boys. She might have set herself at ease in the case of Miss Macnab. The foolish heart that had fluttered beneath the two chaste white rosebuds donned in honour of a certain Professor, the head not otherwise beneath the bewitching hat worn in honour of the same gentleman, were incapable of meanness. Olympia Macnab was not a heroine, but was something very near it; to wit, a “lady,” in the quaint, old-fashioned sense of the word—a word, folks say, grow-

ing obsolete, and yet one which the good qualities once associated with it, made, once, not altogether to be despised. I allude to the trustfulness, the truthfulness, the gentleness, the dignity (the last named, certes, a little touched with pompousness) which one still meets with, strongly marked, in women of an older day, or in women, like our Olympia, brought up like them. We may smile at these characteristics in their old-time guise; we cannot choose but, to a certain extent, admire them—in the same way as we admire old lace and all old things, as delicate and strangely beautiful, if a little musty.

Having cast one scornful gaze at the girl who had deemed the breakfast-room a fitting place in which to hold her up to derision, Miss Macnab wasted not another thought on Eugénie, but, quietly taking the chair proffered her by Monsieur la Mie, said, looking up at him from beneath the *belle jardinière*, italicizing freely, as was her fashion, and blushing ever so slightly—

“Do you think, Professor, *really*, that we shall have to spend a *whole* day indoors?—Ah, you *cruel* prophet!”

For Monsieur la Mie had answered, “I really think we shall, Miss Macnab,” as, smiling, he took his seat beside the Scotchwoman,—filled with wonderment, not so much at the hat, the blush, and the italics, as at the simple self-possession shown by one, the victim of such recent and gross rudeness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FURTHER EVENTS OF THE MORNING.—ALPENSTOCKS AND ENGLISH VANDALISM.

If the surprise was great which was felt at Miss Macnab's making her entry into the breakfast-room as

usual in her hat, with the rain beating its hardest against the window, and a sky showing no sign of the clouds clearing away, no smaller was the astonishment when the black-robed family Luscombe-Binns, a doleful procession of six, made their appearance, armed, as usual, with their *alpenstocks*. It had been generally understood that the Luscombe-Binnses in bringing their *alpenstocks* to every meal, had had some such idea as that given out by Miss Macnab for wearing her hat—that they thought it as well to have their staves always by them, because “after all” the greater part of the day was spent out-of-doors. What heightened the amazement now felt by the company was that, whilst appearing equipped as usual, the Luscombe-Binnses did not pretend to have the slightest hope that the weather would change; but, having ordered their breakfast, whilst waiting for it, went prodding about the room, to the horror of Frau Metzle and Frau Spätzle, —loudly lamenting the prospect of a day indoors. Mrs. Luscombe-Binns took the lead, walking along a brown board in the floor, one of those painted, paraffined stripes which are the pride of continental housewives, and into which she dug her stock at every second step. It is only just to say that she did so meaning no harm—unconscious, in fact, of what she was doing, being altogether carried away by exasperation at the state of the weather, while, as for the *alpenstock*, she had not yet learned its use; it being doubtful, indeed, whether a certain class of British tourist will ever learn the use of this article, or realize that, however well adapted it be with its metal tip to help the climber in the Alps, it is not a suitable implement to introduce into even a boarding-house sitting-room. It was, perhaps, rather Mrs. Luscombe-Binns’s misfortune than her fault, that,

whatever she did, she was therein straightway copied by her husband and children. Thus she had hardly walked half the length of the brown stripe in question, leaving an indentation in it at every second step, when her family, forming into file behind her, followed her example, and in concert belaboured the unhappy stripe—Messrs. and little Master Binns with virile energy, the Misses Binns with all the power that in them lay. Two paces (the footfalls became monotonous), then a thump of the alpenstocks; again two paces and another thump; two paces, thump; two paces, thump;—thus the family Luscombe-Binns made the grand tour of the room.

This had not gone on for many seconds before there reigned at the breakfast-table, as regards conversation, one of those complete lulls which quite as regularly precede a storm in the social as in the atmospheric realm. Madame la Mie, with her lips pursed, slipped her hand into the breast of her overcoat, and, leaning back in her chair, just as an elderly gentleman might have done—the dear defunct to wit, could he have come to life again—calmly waited for events to develop. Monsieur la Mie, with his eyes fixed studiously on the table, busied himself in seeking to balance his teaspoon on the edge of his cup—a thing which it needs some skill to accomplish, but the trouble spent on which is more than repaid, no doubt, by the rapture which ensues on having found that position in which the spoon does actually for some twentieth part of a minute hover in the air. Miss Macnab, who, a true Englishwoman, was making a substantial meal on what abroad is called a “shop,” in place of the light repast which in most countries outside ours is dignified with the name of breakfast, stopped in the midst of cutting a toothsome morsel from the delicacy in

question, and sat motionless, holding her knife and fork at that graceful angle which none but your English-woman ever hits to perfection. Madame Roland, who had dipped her bread into her coffee to impart to it the flavour which acts as a substitute for butter on the Continent, stopped midway in carrying it to her lips, with the result that the moistened part loosened and speedily illustrated that unfortunate tendency inherent in all things to fall to the centre. Margaret Winkelried was sipping her coffee out of her spoon, with little finger extended in the German fashion; she looked pensive and a trifle lachrymose, the well-known effect on the spirit of coffee thus slowly imbibed. Beside her Eugénie Roland, with a would-be infantile expression, was dotting off on her fingers the number of times which resounded the sixfold footfall, accompanied by the sixfold thump of the alpenstocks, as the family Luscombe-Binns continued its perambulation along the precious stripe. The Peachums adult forgot for one whole minute to keep their eyes on Peachum juvenile, the eccentric Die, who profited by the omission to help herself afresh, and in liberal style, to the honey, never absent from a Swiss table at this time of the year; which dainty she forthwith managed to spread on her face and hands, all over her plate, the tablecloth, her dress, and the dresses of her neighbours on either side, in a manner showing some skill, it must be allowed, but skill of a kind which made the company feel that the proper reward for it would have been what the mother of the sweet child termed a "spanking." Captain Macnab evinced his appreciation of the proceeding of the Luscombe-Binnses and its electrifying effect on the breakfast-table company, by gazing first at the former and then at the latter, *en masse* and individually,

with a look on his face which caused his sister Olympia to become, as she afterwards said, "turn about hot and cold," so much did it seem as if he could hardly contain his laughter—"men *are* such babies." The alarm was unneeded; for once the captain behaved irreproachably—that is to say, he did not laugh, or smile, or hem, or whistle, or cough, or commit himself in any of the many ways in which tiresome brothers with a sense of the ludicrous do, when that sense is tickled, commonly commit themselves, to the heartbreak of their sisters. After scanning all present with much *sans-gêne*, he composed his features into that look of preternatural guilelessness, the only drawback to which is that all who have any knowledge of men are agreed that it is too good to last. While, such as it was, it was at its acme, he turned his eyes on mine hostess, and, alas! no sooner did he catch the look on that lady's face, than a convulsive twitching about the regions of the crow's-feet showed how justified had been Olympia's fears. She groaned; she frowned. Had Frau Metzle's bearing been undignified, one might have forgiven Walter, but it was dignified to a degree. It was more than dignified; it was impressive. Critics no doubt will say that the first idea presupposes the second. I care not. Impossible were it to string too long a list of synonyms, denoting grandeur, in speaking of the manner of Frau Metzle; and, repeating myself advisedly, I say that her manner, besides being what has been said before, was majestic, was stately, was—the best adjective has been reserved for the last—*statuesque*. This it is which made it so peculiarly provoking that the captain should look at her with that twitching of the crow's-feet becoming more and more marked. Miss Macnab not only groaned, not only frowned; with an

expression little short of terror-struck (fancy seeing the man whom you call brother on the verge of exploding in the face of a living sphinx), she said—poor Olympia, she never could collect her thoughts quickly—

“Walter, will you—er—pass—*pass anything?*” and on his passing the honey, in sheer confusion, she took a large spoonful of it and put it on the plate with her chop.

Well, men *are* babies, no doubt, and a certain amount of latitude must be granted to them; but when it comes to their ways of the trying species bringing things to a pass like this with their sisters, one is inclined, more than ever, to put the grand question of the day—should not some strong measure be taken to exclude them from a cosmos graced by women?

To quit the aggravating captain and return to Frau Metzle. It has been said that her bearing was one of extreme dignity. None the less did every thump of the six alpenstocks fall on her like a blow aimed at herself. That she kept her countenance as she did, will be understood by those only who remember her past. One has not been “mamsell,” as Frau Metzle had been, to half the nobility of a capital royal, without having gained that peculiar repose of manner, born of a sense of one’s own dignity as compared with the low, the pitiable state of that section of society, which, without having itself a claim to blue blood, cannot even boast of having lived with blue blood; that eminently impressive demeanor, which all who take an interest in social phenomena must surely have noticed marks quite as much, if not more, the attendants on the caste of Vere de Vere, as it does that noble caste itself. With anguish at her heart, as thump after thump of the alpenstocks fell on the brown stripe of her breakfast-room, with her large equine eyes

taking in all that was going on, Frau Metzle knew better than to let the habitual calm of her features abate one jot. At the head of her table she sat, dark, mysterious as always; her nose, which was of unusual dimensions, quivering very slightly—so slightly that none but a physiognomist born, perhaps, would have seen the tremble; her nether lip, which protruded, thrust mayhap a little more forward than usual; her figure erect, motionless, in its usual garb of black.

But if Frau Metzle maintained her dignity, her servant did not. The latter, appearing with the Luscombe-Binnses' breakfast, stood in the doorway, looking at the alpenstock-bearers for a full half-minute; then, setting down her tray on the nearest chair, rushed into the room, seized their staves from the two juveniles, and, standing with one in each hand, in her native *patois*, poured forth a volley of anathematism on the astonished family, in which the words "English," "paint," and "oil," were repeated so often and with gestures so significant as to leave no doubt in the minds of her hearers as to what was meant; and to make it necessary for Frau Spätzle to rise, as the old lady did, in all the comeliness of her snowy cap, her white neckerchief, and simple print frock, short in the bodice and full in the skirt (for the mother of mine hostess was curiously unlike her daughter), and, raising one withered hand, in her cracked old voice to rebuke the girl—

"Ist gut, Babett! Was schwätzest du da! Bedenke doch, es sind Engländer!"

So much for the first event of the morning.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“WHAT SAY?”—A FULL BLUE EYE.

It is not to be supposed that fate had anything so bright in store for our rained-up tourists as a series of piquant incidents resembling that of the Luscombe-Binnses' belabouring the brown stripe. In fact, when that family and the company generally had partaken of breakfast, and the interval which our organisms make it necessary to exist between one repast and another had fairly set in, the inmates of the Edelweiss one and all succumbed to that species of nervous depression which, quickly going from bad to worse, ends in the profound misery called glumness. It poured. Here a remark:—

In a small way there are perhaps few things more aggravating than when, in a fit of absence of mind, you exclaim, “What say?” in connection with something you have heard perfectly well, and have to listen to its being retailed all over again, slowly and with emphasis. If there be anything in the world more annoying, it is that you may interrupt the tale, as told for the second time, with a second “What say?” (again in pure absence of mind), and be obliged to listen to it a third time, told still more slowly and with still more emphasis. At this point the thing becomes little short of maddening, and if this happen to you on a pouring day, on which, as it is, your spirits are at their lowest ebb, and your nervous system is generally upset, there is no saying to what act of desperation you may be led.

The company in the breakfast-room of the Rose des Alpes were distributed as follows!—Monsieur la Mie standing at a window; opposite to him, Captain Macnab; at another window, Mr. Luscombe-Binns; opposite to him,

Juan Luscombe-Binns; between Captain Macnab and Monsieur la Mie, Mervyn Luscombe-Binns; between the Luscombe-Binnses, father and son, Margery Luscombe-Binns. Monsieur la Mie, Captain Macnab, and the two Luscombe-Binnses adult, stood in very much the same attitude, each with one side of his head more or less gracefully reclining against the window-frame, each with one foot more or less picturesquely drawn up, each with both hands pocketed, each gazing at the rain. The little Luscombe-Binnses stood flattening their faces against the window-pane.—Perhaps one ought hardly to wonder at the children, but one cannot help feeling a mild kind of astonishment that men in time of rain should feel so irresistibly drawn to the window. True, there is little for one to do when made a prisoner to the house. Very few persons of either sex care to set about reading, playing, singing, or, indeed, any regular form of recreation, at once after breakfast. Women most often look up their ribbons and laces, or unpick a dress, or trim a hat; somehow men never seem to think of unpicking a coat or of trimming a hat. This deplorable circumstance is possibly at bottom of their aimless clustering about windows on rainy mornings. As illustrating the danger attending this, I append the dialogue which took place between Monsieur la Mie and Captain Macnab on the unhappy morning of which this chapter treats.

It was a fashion with the captain to relate on every possible occasion an adventure of his as a youngster at Eton. He began the story as usual:

“This reminds me, Professor, of a day when I was a youngster at——”

“*Plait-il?*” said Monsieur la Mie, who was lost in a brown study.

"This reminds me——"

Now, the captain had only got so far when it flashed upon Monsieur la Mie that he had heard perfectly well what had been said the first time. In sheer confusion he repeated—

"*Plait-il?*"

"This reminds——" The Englishman raised his voice with a trifle of anger. Was this Frenchman deaf?

Monsieur la Mie started, and still, his wits only half about him, stammered, "*Plait-il?*"

Flesh and blood could stand it no longer. The captain fairly roared, "My goodness, sir, have you no ears? I was saying, this——"

Was he, could he, be going to begin the story again? Invoking all the deities inwardly, Monsieur la Mie pleaded an excuse and left him. I have heard on good authority that the captain never again told the story of his adventure as a youngster at Eton. I have also heard that some coolness grew up between him and Monsieur la Mie in connection with this morning's conversation. If so, certain it is it did not last, and indeed I should not have mentioned the passing *fracas* but for the reason given above, as a warning, that is, to beings of the resourceless sex in case of rainy mornings.

While this brief dialogue was taking place between Monsieur la Mie and Captain Macnab, the party at the opposite window preserved unbroken silence. It consisted, as the reader knows, of three members of the family Luscombe-Binns, *i.e.* the two gentlemen and Margery. It was Mrs. Luscombe-Binns's fashion, when speaking of her son Juan, to lay stress on what she called "his full blue eye." In case any one should think that the interesting young man had only one eye, or at least only

one to which the epithets full and blue might be applied, let me hasten to say that he had the usual apportionment of two, and that each was as full and as blue as the other. Why, in speaking of eyes, people should, as they often do, single out one for description, any more than in talking of teeth they would single out one, it is hard to say. Surely custom, if it sanction the mention of a "full blue eye" as a charm, should also permit the mention of a "straight white tooth" as a pleasing feature; yet, somehow, one instinctively knows that one would be loudly derided, did one mention a straight white tooth among the attractions of one's hero. So much for logic. It gives me pleasure to be able to state that the inmates of the Edelweiss showed sense enough of the ludicrousness of Mrs. Luscombe-Binns's remark to dub her son unanimously within three days of her advent, "The youth with the full blue eye." When last we saw the latter he was standing at the window; there he is standing still, and I may add that on this particular day there is to a marked degree in his eye, and in the droop of his eyelid, that which gives to the expression a pensive yet amorous turn. Away from the object of his adoration as he now is (though she is only in the next room), he fixes his gaze on vacancy with large expanded eyelid and fixed brow (here let me say that nothing but his mother's example, could persuade me to speak of Juan as though he were a nineteenth-century Cyclops). On the other hand, the beloved one need but enter the room where he is, and he will develop all the peculiarities of the myope, especially that one of constantly blinking; whereat no one will wonder when it is known that the object of his love was no less dazzling a person than Eugénie Roland. This bewitching young woman did not even

disdain to bring to her feet our poor friend. It was as needful to her to have at her beck and call one of his species as it was novel to him to be at the beck and call of one like her. She made him her slave, she laughed at him, she got him into all kinds of trouble, she made his life a misery to him, and when he told her so, she smiled at him through her little teeth and set all right again. Folks wondered what would come of it; they might have spared themselves the trouble, as we for the present will do.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISS SCOLLOP'S SENSE OF SMELL.

TWELVE o'clock. Time does creep on, howbeit slowly. The dinner-hour is approaching at the Rose des Alpes.

Madame Auguier is not in the pleasantest of humours. What will you? There is nothing more difficult than to cook for a stay-at-home party. They who go out bring appetites to dinner; they who stay in bring captious tempers. They have had nothing to carry their thoughts into other channels; the hopes of hours have been built up on a delicious meal, and if delicious it be not, woe betide the hostess. All this applies to the thirteen gentlemen, who, with their chief, Madame Morel, as yet formed (*sotto voce* be it said) the entire visiting corps at the Pension Rose des Alpes. Far be it from me to wish to reflect ill credit on persons the very vocation of whom, as teachers of the young of the Nineteenth Century, implies cerebral power of a high order, and of whom it has already been said that they worthily represented an aggregate of five hundred and eighty-five ounces of brain.

Still—murder will out!—it must be admitted that there was among them not one who did not with more or less anxiety watch the hour-hand perform its usual slow march on the dining-room clock, and hail with unaffected delight the appearance of the cock that flew out of the little door over it every fifteen minutes, and then flew back, shutting the door after it in a way that no cock outside a Swiss clock has ever been known to do.

It was not until twelve, however—which hour the cock crowed in a manner that caused the thirteen ladies to cover their ears with their hands, so shrill were the notes and so great was the strain to the tympanum—that the excitement reached its climax, and Miss Scollop, like a sensible woman that she was, not pretending to be ashamed of what was, after all, a very human weakness, said—

“*Apropos* of dinner—of course you’re all thinking of dinner—is my nose deceiving me?” (Like most of our countrywomen, Miss Scollop had strongly developed smelling susceptibilities.) “I seem to get the odour of cabbage—cabbage swimming in fat. Be quiet a moment, ladies, please”—this with her finger on her lips.

The mention of “cabbage” had caused a murmur of conversation to go round the room, which at the words and impressive gesture of the Englishwoman was at once hushed. To one of ordinary brain it might seem that it did not need total absence of sound to afford free play to the olfactory sense. But then, Miss Scollop was a lady of more than common mentality, and as such her colleagues accorded to her implicit obedience. Perfect silence reigning, the Englishwoman contracted her nose in a way which, however much it may have aided her in making assurance doubly sure as regards the smelling of

cabbage, yet necessitated a general facial contortion so curious that Marie Minard, for one, so far forgot the respect due to a daughter of Albion as to break the silence with peals of laughter. Miss Scollop took no notice of this; no doubt she charitably attributed the sudden hilarity of the young Frenchwoman to other motives. The gift which the gods have given us to see others as they do not see themselves, does indeed curiously blind us as regards our own persons; and while the absurdity of our neighbours affords to most of us moments of exquisite amusement, it is amazing how little enjoyment we derive from our own ridiculousness.

"Certainly, cabbage—cabbage swimming in fat," muttered Miss Scollop, with no modification, but rather an increase of the contortion already mentioned. Then she rang the bell, a little irascibly, as was her way, and said to the damsel who answered the summons, "*Cela song trop mauvais; dites à madame, je ne vous pas cette horr'ible choux.*"

Poor Madame Auguier!

The above episode had resulted in speechless consternation seizing all the gentlewomen, and it was some time before the subject of dinner was renewed among them. The first to speak again was Miss Scollop herself.

"Now I think of it, I should not be surprised," she said, looking thoughtfully at the company, "if that message I sent hurt the good woman's feelings. I should be sorry for that."

That this idea should dawn so late on their colleague and then cause her honest regret, was so astounding to the others that they simply stared at her.

"You think the idea far-fetched. Well, perhaps it is; perhaps it is," said Miss Scollop, mistaking the motive of

their silence, while she thought in her heart of hearts that their not entering into her fears showed rather a lack of nice feeling in these Frenchwomen. "I am peculiarly sensitive myself," she added, "which makes me feel I should dislike nothing so much as to hurt the feelings of others. Really the more I think of it now, the more sorry I am that I sent that message. What are you kissing me for, my dear?"

"Because," said Marie Minard, who had risen and approached the comical Englishwoman—"because, you dear old soul, love, in the language of science, is an explosive emotion, and—one cannot help loving you."

A truer word the young Frenchwoman never spoke.

That dinner! It was the cause of more than one strange episode. While on the subject of it and the thirteen gentlewomen, I must tell of a curious dilemma into which one of the latter fell,—the individual hitherto called in these pages the nondescript young woman, in consequence of her having, as far as is known to me, no marked idiosyncrasy. Nameless, therefore, as she has been, she shall remain. It wanted a minute or so to one—the dinner-hour at the Rose des Alpes—as was notified not only by the hand of the clock, but by premonitory rumblings from the region behind occupied by chanticleer. Of the thirteen ladies and their chief, the only one who was now in the dining-room was the said young woman, for the simple reason that she alone of the party did not pay the respect which is commonly deemed due to a meal called dinner, and which respect at the Rose des Alpes took the form of nothing so elaborate as a total change of dress, but consisted in an amount of titivation going so far as the redressing of hair, with an addition to the morning costume, say, of a fresher ribbon or of a flower, the utmost that was aimed at being the not very

high-flown idea underlying such words as "neat," "pleasing to the eye," etc. Why the nondescript young woman was above or beneath taking that trouble, I cannot say. She herself was wont to declare that by infinite care in the selection of the most unbecoming attire, and unerring attention to be always unneat, she tried to impart to her exterior that touch of the non-conventional which nature had withheld. But let that pass. The fact of main importance on the present occasion is that she stood alone in the dining-room. As she did so her eyes wandered down the table, and what held them enthralled being worthy in every way of detailed description, I will begin a new chapter with it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DINNER-TABLE AT THE ROSE DES ALPES.

WHATEVER the dinner was to be like at the Rose des Alpes on this day of rain, and probably it would be no better than usual, the table arrangements were specially magnificent. To begin with, contrary to custom, all the silver in the house was displayed. By silver is meant, of course, forks and spoons of whatever description. There is a vulgarity attached to the particularizing of steel, black handles, and copper, which not even the presence thereof on a table can, it seems to me, warrant. The next striking feature was the unusual quantity of crystal; which term crystal again is used in its widest sense. The critical mind may cavil at its being applied to a substance so thick as to make you wonder that it was pervious to light at all, and of a greenish hue commonly met with only in bottles; I am aware of this and my plea

is that, here, as in every other part of the present narrative—availing myself of woman's privilege—I decline to cope with the critical mind, and repeat that, what with the exhibition of crystal and silver—two bottle-green glasses for every ordinary one, not to mention ditto decanters and jugs and vases; two spoons, two forks for every ordinary one, not to mention extra quantities of table-spoons, arranged in sparkling rosettes, like so many Catherine-wheels in repose—what with all this, and more, the sight was really dazzling, and there is every reason to believe that the nondescript young woman, on whom it first flashed, was overpowered by the splendour and brilliancy of it, which would in a measure account for the light that came into her eyes (they were brown eyes; abnormally solemn usually), as also for the fact that she so far lost her wits as to commit the deed which brought her into the dilemma of which this chapter will deal. She looked down the glittering rows of glass and metal, after which her gaze rested with a sort of relief on the lines of napkins down either side of the table, howbeit they too afforded a new and striking spectacle; contrary to custom, not two being folded alike. If one represented a pinnacle, into the summit of which was artfully insinuated the morsel of bread which helps us to while away the pauses between the courses, the next was folded perfectly plainly, but with no less art, and illustrated some kind of mosaic work. It was as if Monsieur Louis Auguier—for, needless to say, the highly ornate arrangement of the dinner-table on this depressing day of rain was the work of Monsieur Louis Auguier—it was as if that marvellous little man had studied the various styles in building which have been in vogue from the oldest time (I would mention only the Egyptian, Greek, Persian,

Roman, Byzantine, Gothic and Romance), and had folded his table-napkins each to illustrate a specimen of these schools; that is, to represent, if not so many temples, basilicas, and churches—preserve us from hyperbole!—yet elaborate forms of architecture commonly found only in such edifices. And for the second time be it said that, excepting on the hypothesis that great was the agitation into which the contemplation of all this cast the afore-said young woman, one cannot understand her doing that which she did.

Standing at the head of the table in face of a covered soup-tureen, much as, no doubt, the youth of the classic legend stood before the covered image of Isis, of which an oracle forbade exposure, she said, oddly enough, the very words put by tradition into the lips of the inquisitive Greek, when about to raise the veil—

“Be under it what will, I’ll lift it up!”

Perhaps, after all, it was not in the best taste to bring Greek legend to bear on the case in point. Yet it is so seldom that in these days of non-classical education, a classical story presents itself to the mind, that when it does one is tempted to make use of it. Halt it, then, as it may, the above comparison shall remain. In so far as the Greek youth and my young woman were both prompted by inquisitiveness, I fail to see that, at the outset, the position of one was grander than that of the other. After that, be it frankly admitted, a difference begins; for what the nondescript young woman saw was nothing so grandiosely weird as what the youth at Saïs beheld.

Raising the heavy cover very softly, her eyes met nothing more nor less than a dark, steaming decoction with a fatty substance on the surface—an unsavoury-

looking fluid which abroad they call soup. As she looked at it, her lips—at no time of the species commonly known as “chiselled”—assumed a grimace which showed them at their very worst. She was still standing thus, with the lid at a convenient angle for obtaining a full view of the interior of the tureen, when the cock already mentioned more than once as having its roost somewhere behind the little door at the top of the clock, darted out in the curiously spasmodic way in which it was its custom to dart out every fifteen minutes; crew its loudest five times (four for the quarters and one for the hour); and then bounded back again, shutting the little door after it in its usual punctilious style. This crowing it was that caused my heroine to look up; and here it is that *her* story becomes weird. As she did so she encountered—two small, flat eyes.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE NONDESCRIPT YOUNG WOMAN SEEKS REFUGE IN FLIGHT.

THE hero of the Greek legend succumbed to a shock to the feelings; and, poetically speaking, the nondescript young woman should have expired on the spot at the blow levelled at her in the gaze of the small, flat eyes of Monsieur Louis Auguier, when he caught her in the ignominious posture described in last chapter—her, the instructress of youth, blue-stockings, lady-professor, peering under a soup-tureen lid. She did nothing of the kind. In real life nothing, indeed, is rarer than total annihilation by a figurative blow, and for six human beings who die from the effects of a cold in the head, not one succumbs to the effects of such a shock as that

experienced by the heroine of this chapter. Not that her face did not undergo a ghastly sort of change. It did, as, with the soup-tureen lid still in her hand, she—fled. Out of the dining-room, up the stairs she rushed, into a room which she shared with Miss Scollop. Thrusting the lid into the hands of that astonished person, she threw herself into a chair.

“Oh, it was too dreadful! If you love me, don’t ask me what has happened. Only take that back; the soup will be getting cold. Make any excuse for my not appearing at dinner. I simply cannot face that ogre again. You might say that I am not always accountable for my actions; get periodical fits of softening of the brain—result of overstudy with you, of trying to read up your Shakespeare with the Clarendon notes; of—of——”

Miss Scollop shook her head. It was plain to her that her colleague was suffering from an attack on the nerves; head burning, pulse—— Well, well; brown paper soaked in vinegar to the forehead, soothing pills, a darkened room, rest, and a little nap might set all right.

“Stop chattering and lie down, there’s a good soul,” she said; and—to my pain I say it—the nondescript young woman was ready enough to assume the character of invalid. It would avert the necessity of her appearing at table, and give her time to reflect on what she had done. Calmly face Monsieur Louis Auguier within five minutes of the above encounter she felt she could not. With a shudder of laughter, she hid her face in the pillows for a moment; then raised it to let her friend bandage it with brown paper; finally (this the really callous part of her conduct) suffering that good lady to leave the room on tiptoe, taking the soup-tureen lid with her, which article Miss Scollop bore to the dining-room,

and there returned to Monsieur Louis Auguier with much solemnity of demeanour and a stately apology in her usual stately French, the gist of which was that she was "*beaucioup* fâchée" that the tureen-lid should have been taken away, but her colleague was—er—suffering from acute headache, and begged the apparent strangeness of her conduct might be overlooked in consideration of her highly excitable state.

Poor Miss Scollop! Whether it was what she said, her manner of saying it, or Monsieur Louis Auguier's recollection of the colleague she spoke of, as he had last seen that person, or the effect of all these things combined, I cannot say, but this much is positive—that if at any time in his life it could be said of the proprietor of the Rose des Alpes, that his small, flat eyes visibly twinkled, that moment had arrived when Miss Scollop finished speaking. The flash was, in fact, so evident that it all but struck Miss Scollop herself, who only decided that she had been wrong concerning it, when, on her more closely inspecting the small, flat eyes before her, they subsided into their wonted gravity, and it struck the good lady more than ever how extremely small and remarkably flat they were; how completely and curiously lacking, too, in that brilliancy without which the possibility of an eye's twinkling is scarcely conceivable; all men of science agreeing that, however many items may enter into its composition, a twinkle is, after all, mainly composed of brightness. A thing, however, which did not escape Miss Scollop's notice, and which struck her as heartless, whilst typical of French flippancy, was that, on her graphically describing at table what she considered the alarming condition of the one member absent thereat, reaching its climax, as she averred, in

the fact of her having rushed upstairs like a madwoman with the soup-tureen lid in her hand, the story, told with much seriousness, was received with ill-repressed gurgles of laughter. Nay, more. She found that no amount of indignant arguing on her part would deter Marie Minard from carrying in her own hands course after course to the invalid, whose appetite, strangely enough, seemed in no wise impaired by her sudden attack of illness; so little so, in fact, that to her speechless amazement, Miss Scollop, on returning to the room which they shared in common, found her sitting up in bed, clasping in one hand, and with an expression meant to be tragic, the brown paper bandage to her forehead, while with a spoon in the other she was making rapidly less a large portion of some sweet confection on a plate before her. Miss Scollop was no longer in the flower of youth; she was fat, and had a double chin. With head held in such an exactly straight line with her body as to bring her double chin into stern outline, with scintillating eye, raised eyebrows, and her full, good-natured lips tightly clasped, her whole attitude, but especially her double chin, spoke; for what so well as a double chin shows the state of its owner's feelings? The nondescript young woman dropped her spoon; Marie Minard, with melodramatic suddenness, dropped on her knees; but Miss Scollop wished to appear vastly indignant, howbeit her anger was fast melting. She kept her eyebrows still raised, her lips still firmly closed; but her double chin had, without her knowledge (for what being thinks of keeping guard on a double chin?), unrolled itself and fallen into its old, smiling outline, the last crease in it fading into a trace so soft that the painter of Mona Lisa, and he alone, could have reproduced it on canvas. This

phenomenon observing, Marie Minard jumped up, and for a second time in face of the droll, kind-hearted Englishwoman gave proof unmistakable that love is indeed an explosive emotion. After which she told her the true story of the young woman's scrape, to which Miss Scollop listened with an expression hopelessly struggling with laughter.

By this time it was nearly two o'clock. An hour later came off what I will venture to call the next important event of the day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MADAME MOREL RECEIVES A LETTER FROM MADAME ROLAND.

THREE o'clock. A tap at Madame Morel's door.

"May I come in?" It was the nondescript young woman. "This letter, madame, has just come for you. The bearer waits for an answer."

"For me?" Madame Morel studied the address on the envelope with the deep interest which many people take in this performance; then turned the letter over. "Have you a penknife, dear?" (When alone with any of her subordinates, Madame Morel always said "dear.") "Thank you! thank you!" as the too zealous young woman dived into a pocket and produced a miscellaneous assortment of handkerchiefs, pencil-stumps, india-rubbers, letters, and gloves, but no penknife. "A hair-pin will do. Nay, do not trouble. I have one myself. Will you pass me that book?"

The not bad-hearted young person, with an ill-advised impulse of obliging, had abstracted from her own head one of the very few pins which held her rather

luxuriant hair in check. With dishevelled locks, she handed the volume in question; then contemplated her superior, balance the letter on it, and open it slowly, carefully, by means of inserting the pin, which she worked along steadily, much as if she were opening a tin of preserves. As she did so, she said—

“How it does rain, dear, does it not?”

The speech was one which every one at the house had heard made at least twenty times on this same day; so there were what in law would be called extenuating circumstances. None the less did madame glower ominously as she missed the usual, sprightly, “Yes, so it does,” and rightly guessed that the nondescript young woman was turning to her remark what a nondescript young woman should never turn to anything—the bothered ear. It struck her as pert, and she was only reassured when, on looking at the offending party, she noticed that her gaze was fixed on one corner of the ceiling, than which really nothing gives to the human physiognomy a more far-away, harmless,—nay, meaningless expression. Her suspicion speedily vanishing, and with it her wrath, she abstracted the letter from its envelope, read it once, twice; then affably handed it to her subordinate.

“Read it to me, dear”—airily.

The nondescript one read it:—

“Madame Roland presents her compliments to Madame Morel, and begs the pleasure of her company to tea and whist at four.”

“Thank you. A peculiarly amiable letter, is it not?”

The young woman addressed looked slightly taken aback. It struck her as normally polite; nothing more.

In what lay its peculiar amiability she failed to see. As the question was, however, repeated—determined not to enrage her superior—she said, with effusiveness, well-meant, but perhaps a little overdone—

“Yes, really, so it is. I don’t think I ever read anything so——”

Here she stopped, rather surprised at her own eloquence, or perhaps (so moralists “for the sake of common humanity” will hope) overwhelmed by the stupendousness of the falsehood which she had all but uttered.

Strange to say, madame did not seem to think the eulogium in the least exaggerated. She asked to be passed a blotter, taking from which some half-dozen of nibs, she proceeded to try them one after the other, and, having at last fixed on one for use, began, as was her custom, to write out on a slip of paper the opening stanzas of the poem with the inspired refrain, “We are Seven.”

“A very good habit,” she said, by way of explanation; “an old one with me, dear. It gets one’s pen into order, and one’s hand and head into swing.”

Something like a faint groan sounded from the region where sat the unhappy young woman. She said nothing, however, but busied herself with fastening and unfastening a thin gold band which she wore on one arm—one of those bracelets which, if they cannot be called things of beauty, can yet be recommended to those born fiddlers who have no talent for the violin.

Having finished writing the sixth stanza of the poem aforesaid, Madame Morel took out a packet of tinted note-paper, selected from it a sheet of a sickly pink hue, and, laying it straight before her, took her pen in the orthodox way, with fingers spread out like a fan. Was

she going to write at last? Her subordinate thought she was, and gave a sigh of relief—too soon.

“She sends ‘best compliments,’ does she not?” said madame, suddenly looking up.

“‘Best compliments’?” came the reply, in an absent-minded tone. “Yes, I think so.”

“‘Think so?’ Merciful heavens, mademoiselle!” Madame jumped up as if electrified. “Do you only ‘think’ in the matter?”

The nondescript one started in sympathy. There was a tone of genuine horror in madame’s voice that suddenly revealed to her in all its enormity the reprehensibleness of her being in a position in which, if put upon oath, she could not say without reconsulting the missive, had Madame Roland written “best compliments” or only “compliments.”

“If you will allow me,” she stammered, with proper contrition in her voice, “to read the letter once more, I can tell you positively.” Then taking up the note, and thinking to kill two birds with one stone, she read, with more good-will, indeed, than good taste—

“*Compliments!* Madame Roland presents her *compliments*’—not ‘*best* compliments’—‘to Madame Morel, and begs the pleasure’—*pleasure*, not ‘*great* pleasure.’”

“Enough!” exclaimed Madame Morel, tartly. “*Great* pleasure, indeed! Is it possible, mademoiselle, you do not know that there is nothing more vulgar than the piling up of adjectives?”

Mademoiselle looked slightly nonplussed, and, both ladies subsiding into silence, the letter was finished and despatched to the opposite inn.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MADAME MOREL BEFORE THE PARTY.

It still wanted twenty minutes to four when Madame Morel made her appearance among her staff in the sitting-room of the *Rose des Alpes*. Her toilette showed elaborate care, her dress being one of those silks of the good old days, very fine in the grain and highly glazed; made, moreover, in the good old style, very full in the skirt, with thin scalloped flounces reaching to the bodice. An ample white muslin necktie, fastened butterfly fashion, with a cameo brooch pinned in the central loop, completed her costume. Madame Morel was violent on the subject of modern dress, especially on the appearance of the young woman of the day, which, she declared, was that of a wasp in convulsions. So few people, if any, have had the privilege of seeing wasps in convulsions that it seems a pity Madame Morel did not hit on some simpler comparison. It was also, one cannot help thinking, a mistake on her part, and an injury to the good cause in which she took up the cudgels, that she should have urged, in favour of her own voluminous style of dress, that it gave to the figure that ease and grace so much admired by the ancient Greeks; as one cannot but fancy an ancient Greek, could any such have been unearthed, brought to life again, and confronted with, first a woman in the costume of the day, and then with Madame Morel, as modelled on ancient Greece, with the order to look upon this picture and on this, between the two shocks to the feelings he would have infallibly re-expired on the spot.

Madame Morel held her handkerchief in her hand as

she entered. There is great art in holding a handkerchief, and Madame Morel knew it. The one she bore was of finest cambric, and trimmed with lace. She not only held it, but ostentatiously used it, raising it to her face by the centre so that it fell fanlike over her hand. She did this with a look which said more impressively than words, "Take example by me, my humble friends, and carry off occasional grandeur with an air. There *are* persons, believe me, who carry their cambric handkerchiefs trimmed with lace for mere show, and who would not use them as I do for the world."

Her manner on the whole was affable to a degree, with, however, a touch of ceremony in it, which showed the thirteen ladies that whilst with them in the flesh, in the spirit Madame Morel was already face to face with Madame Roland; and this was indeed the case. Not in malice, but as a warning to others, I will relate the somewhat ridiculous circumstance that Miss Scollop, rising to offer her chair to madame, that lady, instead of accepting it in her usual style with a curt "Thank you," took it with that radiant company smile which says, "So flattered." Needless to add, she did so in pure absent-mindedness, and herself a minute later was covered with confusion at her excessive politeness, as might be expected; for society has long settled that, however great be a man's embarrassment at detecting himself in an act of gross rudeness, it can be nothing to his burning shame at catching himself too polite. Madame, after taking the chair with the smile already commented on, and meeting as she looked up, not the face in her mind, that of Madame Roland, but the plain, honest face of Miss Scollop, rather puckered just now with amusement, was divided between two desires, both happily equally impracticable to carry out—

the first, to box her own ears soundly; the second, to box the ears of her subordinate; with perhaps a third fancy, that it would not be altogether unpleasant to box the ears of humanity generally. No doubt her staff, on the whole, pitied her discomfiture; for the thirteen ladies were simultaneously seized with a fit of amiability, this causing them, as madame rose to go, to form a group about her, one of them fastening her veil, another her gloves, while four precipitated themselves at her feet to loop up her dress, Marie Minard being so specially assiduous as to bring on herself a pat on the back, while the nondescript young woman was all but honoured with an embrace. The latter, pleasantly thoughtful, had fetched in an umbrella, and, overdoing matters a little in her usual style—not ill-meaning, but slightly irrational—had opened it in the room, which caused one or two of her younger colleagues well-nigh to succumb to amusement. Madame Morel herself only faintly smiled, laughter among her subordinates being a thing she rarely countenanced, having herself learned seriousness, she was wont to say, in England, where the “geegle-geegle” (so, she strangely enough maintained, the English called laughter) would not be tolerated. Perhaps, if madame was more proud of one thing than of another, it was of her sojourn in England, and of the benefits which she asserted she had derived therefrom. She paid our language the compliment of richly interlarding her conversation with it. Thus instead of sending greetings in French, she sent a “shekkends.” Her friend, Monsieur la Mie, was a “tchentlem’n” (a fact which she stated with something between a sneeze and a choke); and her house was her “homm,” reminding her at every turn of that most exquisite song, “Homm, sweet homm!” All that in passing. The faintness of the smile

with which she met her subordinate's gaiety on the present occasion, warned those ladies in time to check the "geegle-geegle." Solemnly preceded by the nondescript young woman to the door, she took from the latter her umbrella, and holding it in one hand, while in the other she still held her pocket-handkerchief, she left the room, and set out for the opposite inn with her sprightly company bound, a medium between canary and kangaroo step.

"In the name of the whole worshipful company of teachers, who is this Madame Roland?" asked the Orientalist, as from the window she watched the lady principal gingerly pick her steps on her way to the Rose des Alpes.

"Madame Roland" (the speaker was Marie Minard) "is a Person of Quality, a Lady of Substance,—who dabbles in education."

The Orientalist throws herself into an easy-chair. "I knew you were going to say that. Now, explain to me one thing, my friends. What can bewitch a lady of substance to dabble in education? The very first thing I shall do when I marry Substance or Quality is, drop education and everything to do with it."

"All teachers and former colleagues, to wit. Ah, you pretty piece of fidelity! And the worst of it is, you're sure to marry 'Substance or Quality,' as you put it," and the speaker, still Marie Minard, looks down at the dark, handsome face with the Eastern languor in it. "I have a sort of witch-in-Macbeth feeling on the subject. It will be high, higher, highest. Hail to thee, hail to thee, all hail!"

"You ridiculous creature! Chaff as you may, I do think work was a dreadful invention. Fancy having to teach all one's life, turning every day more and more into

a Madame Morel, the height of one's pride being asked to a cup of tea with a Madame Roland, the lady-patron. Quite the worst thing of our life, I think the lady-patrons. Is it not a simple affliction that women cannot do anything fairly well, but there spring up on every side of them persons of quality, ready to pat them under the chin and 'take an interest' in them, for that is all it comes to."

"Don't be crabby, there's a good soul," says Marie Minard, amused at this tirade from one commonly so listless as her clever fellow-worker. "They're not half bad at heart, though they do shake hands with you sitting, and show deplorable ill-breeding. To change the subject, I would draw your attention to the fact that for full one quarter of an hour not the smallest remark has been passed on the weather."

"*Il plou* encore," remarks Miss Scollop, sententiously.

While sly smiles at her expense pass round the room, we will betake ourselves to the Edelweiss.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THREE FAT LADIES, THE SOFA, AND MADAME MOREL'S HUMILIATION.—TEA AT THE EDELWEISS.—WHIST.

A FRENCHWOMAN past the prime of life is commonly fat, and three Frenchwomen past the prime of life, in nine cases out of ten, will present such a picture of corpulence as is rarely seen in England. Notable instances of this were Mesdames Roland, La Mie, and Morel. Not that they were equally stout; far from it. Madame Morel, who, when alone, struck you as fat, beside Madame la Mie seemed to dwindle into girlish

dimensions; while Madame la Mie, who, seen by herself, struck you as strangely obese, beside the Brobdignagian form of Madame Roland, was, one might almost say, sylph-like.

As a hostess, Madame Roland was impressive in the extreme. "Pray be seated," said she to Madame Morel, leading her to the seat of honour, the sofa.

Madame Morel, always rather a lady of words, said, purely by way of politeness, that to Madame la Mie belonged that place; then began rubbing her hands, which she did with such energy, and they were such fat little hands, that while you looked at them they seemed to form into a ball, and if you were at all imaginative you could hardly suppress a feeling that they might at any moment roll off her arms.

Madame la Mie was not a lady of words. In place of declining the seat, as expected, she drew her coat-tails aside and sat down on the sofa.

I think that was the "bad moment" in Madame Morel's life. In a land where the sofa is a throne, no words can describe the ignominy of sitting on a chair; and surely, in a world where men and women are compelled to be effusive, there is no more cruel trick one could play them than to take them at their word on an occasion like this.

As the poor little lady principal saw herself reduced to take a chair, her little fat hands in the midst of revolution came to a standstill, while her naturally spherical face almost changed to oblong. Madame Roland, bound in etiquette to share the seat of distinction with her guest, sat down beside Madame la Mie, while Mrs. Luscombe-Binns, invited as "fourth hand," took the chair next to Madame Morel's.

Then the ladies partook of tea—such tea! If mine

hostess of the Edelweiss was more undisguisedly proud of one thing than of another at her establishment, it was of her tea. What she begged you to notice was its *bouquet*. You might in your soul of souls cavil at her soups (woe betide you, had you done so aloud!); you might in your inmost heart disapprove of her meats (unhappy you, had you done so in spoken words!); but no, not your soul of souls, not in your inmost heart, could she permit you to find fault with her tea. What she *begged* you to notice was its bouquet.

To begin with, she maintained it was English tea. That stamped it. Like many of her countrywomen, mine hostess of the Edelweiss believed, I fancy, that the tea-tree grows luxuriantly on English soil, and that our harvests of wheat and corn—well enough, no doubt, in their way—are small matters compared to our annual crops of tea.

She did not give this tea on all occasions, nor did she pretend to. Like Brutus, she was an "honourable man." She made no secret that the tea which was ordinarily served at her establishment was Swiss tea. There would, perhaps, have been little use in her trying to make a secret of it, as several of her visitors, having analyzed it, had discovered that the leaves from which it derived its very peculiar flavour, were mostly such as might be found in a green and unboiled condition on various shrubs that flourished round and about the Edelweiss. She was wont to say that in this matter she was actuated by a spirit of philanthropy more than by one of parsimony, being of opinion that so intoxicating a cordial as English tea should not be taken too often.

And now let us look at this tea which she has served to Madame Roland's visitors. It really is not so bad. When you pour in the milk, true, it turns that peculiar

shade of blue which denotes that the leaves have been measured frugally. Yet the tea has a strong flavour. How account for that? Nothing more easy. Frau Metzle would deem into the wilful waste that leads to woful want, not to get all the good out of her English tea. Hence, instead of measuring it into a teapot, she measures it into a pot on the fire, and boils it briskly about as long as you might boil an egg, not longer—*der Himmel bewahre!* What, in that case, would become of the bouquet? A pleasing sight it is to see the Swiss ladies first sip it out of their spoons; then drain the last drop from their cups, with heads and cups held back.

“So delicious a stimulant!” says Madame Morel.

“So fragrant, so spicy!” murmurs Madame la Mie.

Mrs. Luscombe-Binns says nothing.

Then the table is cleared, and cards are brought.

It would be interesting to know how many hundred years old was the game of chess when the habit of “braining” a victorious antagonist first went out. Could one exactly determine this, one might perhaps, by analogy, reckon how many hundred years older the game of whist has yet to become before the custom of all but annihilating a successful adversary will expire.

Madame la Mie and Madame Morel were partners. The deal fell to Madame Morel. Every one has a different style of dealing, and curiously enough the four leading methods (*affectuoso*, *dolce*, *pomposo*, *con fuoco*) were illustrated in the course of this game. Madame Morel set forth the *affectuoso*, dealing the cards with a smiling face and, one might almost say, smiling hands, as though she wished *every one* to get all the trumps—a very Utopia in whist. Mrs. Luscombe-Binns gave a fair illustration of the *dolce* style, spinning out the process,

and laying down the cards as tenderly as though the kings and queens among them were creatures that lived and had their being, whilst possessing, moreover, the delicate organisms peculiar to royalty. The *pomposo* style met with a fine interpreter in Madame Roland, who dealt as though each card were the ace of trumps; and, needless to say, the lady in the coat of the dear defunct gave a spirited rendering of the *con fuoco* method, sending the cards whizzing round the table at double speed. So much for the "deal." To enumerate the various peculiarities shown by the ladies in the course of the game would take too long. It may, however, be mentioned that Madame Morel had the habit of leading with aces so peculiarly aggravating to scientific whist-players; that, with infantile eagerness, she played on the plan of showing her power at any cost, as gleefully outbidding her partner as her opponent—which feature, combined with an ingenuous way of returning her adversaries' lead, and a total disregard as to how many of a suit were out, led, not altogether unnaturally, to her side's losing. Madame la Mie had the habit of looking tragic when her cards were good, and delighted when they were bad, which they were with curious persistency. Once or twice she looked at Madame Morel, and, if an eye could have killed, Madame Morel on the first of these occasions would have given up the ghost. It was not a matter of the odd trick; Mrs. Luscombe-Binns and Madame Roland made *everything*. Some four rubbers played, the ladies fell to discussing the "might have been," throwing into this act all the amiability commonly thrown into it. Mesdames Roland and Luscombe-Binns were at variance as to the peculiar skill of which of them it was that their side had invariably won; Madame Roland inclining to think that

the credit was due to some masterly strokes of hers, while Mrs. Luscombe-Binns expressed a totally different opinion, accompanied by a laugh greatly resembling a snort. Madame la Mie intimated with dangerous blandness that she would be favoured at being told what was Madame Morel's motive in this and this lead; that she would, moreover, feel lively gratitude at learning what advantage that lady deemed to underlie the trumping of tricks already taken by her partner, etc.

In fine, though it still poured rain, the atmosphere having become decidedly worse within the Edelweiss than without, Madame Morel resolved to take her departure. She had a little *migraine*, she said (so, said all the ladies, had they), had spent a charming afternoon, but must really now wing her way home. Her kind friend Madame Roland, she added, with her favourite whinnying laugh, must not forget that she was the queen-bee away from the hive.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MONSIEUR LA MIE'S SENSE OF PROPRIETY IS OFFENDED, AND
HIS VANITY RECEIVES A SHOCK.

JUST as the queen-bee was winging her way to the hive, or, to drop from the language of metaphor to that of everyday life, just as Madame Morel was on her way to the Rose des Alpes, with her dress looped up high, and her umbrella held firmly in both hands—the appearance she thus presented being that of a large mushroom, perhaps, more than of anything else—there happened a very curious thing. Monsieur la Mie, who was standing at a window at the Edelweiss, saw, with his

own eyes, one of the bees being kissed by a gentleman. A curtain had been momentarily pushed aside by a figure passing a window at the Rose des Alpes and had revealed the sight. What in the eyes of Monsieur la Mie added to the horror thereof was the fact that the bee was Marie Minard. What intensified the misery which succeeded his horror was the circumstance that the curtain, which had been momentarily pushed aside, having lapsed into its former folds, showed no sign of moving again, this making it practically impossible for him to see who it was that had kissed the bee.

In view of a confession which I have to make concerning the two feelings uppermost in Monsieur la Mie's mind at this point—were it usual to take one's readers so far into one's confidence—I think I should admit that it just strikes me painfully that my hero, Monsieur la Mie, was perhaps not all that a hero ought to be. Truth to say, he was torn between two equally ignoble desires: the first, that the curtain were still held back, when not all the promptings of conscience would have prevented him from trying to snatch a better sight of the being who kissed the bee; the second, that Madame Morel were not so far ahead, but he could overtake her and whisper to her, with an assumption of righteousness purely proceeding from jealousy, "Queen-Bee, what of the hive? Look, look to the hive!"

These thoughts had hardly taken definite shape in his head, when—it sounds rather prosy, but life is prose, elevated prose at the best—he heard something between a sneeze and a sob, more like the former, perhaps, than the latter. It came from the one other window in the room, and to that window the Professor straightway be-

took himself. His mind was made up. For a man who for years had loved platonically, it was strange that he should thus suddenly decide to rush into matrimony. Yet this was his decision.

"Margaret!" he said.

The world looks bald on paper. As uttered by Monsieur la Mie it contained a volume, which, compressed into a sentence, might run as follows:—

"You love me, my poor maiden. I am a noble grand-pacha, and will make you mine."

At least, to this had Margaret reduced the "volume," when, looking up into the face of the grand-pacha, all her own face working between two feelings, she said—

"Monsieur la Mie, I am too sad for laughter, else indeed you would make me laugh."

A refusal is a refusal, whether it come from the woman whom you love, or the woman of whom you fancy that she loves you. The grand-pacha for weeks past had believed that Margaret, who was indeed breaking her heart, was breaking it for him. He had done violence to his own feelings in proposing to her, for he did not love Margaret. None the less was it with a shock that he learned that her heart was already disposed of; that instead of his reigning there and having reigned there for weeks past, there reigned there and had there for weeks past reigned—another. He was more than shocked; he was for a moment heartily vexed, for in face of this revelation it struck him that there was something, one might almost say, ludicrous—in the part which he had just acted. As he recalled his tone of deep condescension, of, one might almost say, infinite pity, it struck him that that phenomenal being, François la Mie, had—— Nay,

he declined to pursue that line of thought at all. All the vanity in him rebelled, and, true son of Adam, with the taste of apple yet fresh, he bethought himself of throwing the blame on "the woman."

It had been five minutes to six, had any one cared to notice, which nobody did but the invisible author, when Monsieur la Mie, from the heights of his grand pachadom, in a pique against Marie Minard, as the culpable bee, had made an offer of his hand to Margaret Winkelried, telling himself as he did so, that he certainly did not love this damsel, but that she, poor thing, loved him. It was four minutes to six when Margaret Winkelried, poor thing, all but extinguished for a moment the grand-pacha, by letting him see that she loved not him, but another. It is only just to the Professor to say that in the remaining three minutes before the hour he confessed to himself one or two things came under the category of "blunt truths," calling himself, among other names, "a fatuous idiot." The hour had, however, not struck ere he had changed his opinion. Full five seconds before the ever-punctual cock had bounced out and crowed the four quarters, Monsieur la Mie had made up his mind that, far from being himself to blame, he was an injured man, the victim to a woman's wiles; that Margaret had shamelessly "toyed with his affections," and that he might "put her from him" (this caused him quite an effort now) as unworthy of him. In this state Monsieur la Mie conceived some really fine ideas, which he hastened to enter into book of "Pensées,"—ideas on the subject of woman, as Eve leagued with the serpent to beguile poor Adam. It was not the first time that he had framed thoughts of the kind, though, to his credit, be it added that, however

cynical the "pensées" which in passing bitter moods his brain might evolve, his heart had always remained as tender as before. It was merely to regain his self-respect that he now indited six biting epigrams to the memory of perfidious Margaret (so he called her)—epigrams in the truest sense of the word; no clumsy effusions, all "ohs" and "ahs," but satires pure, reminding one of the lace by ladies called "finest point."

No sooner had he done this, than he started from his chair, all but uttering aloud the question which rose to his mind, "Who kissed Marie Minard?"

Goethe, the master at clothing doubtful ideas in pretty words, has said, in his "Truth and Fiction," that it is "a very agreeable sensation" when a new passion begins to arise, before the old has died away, adding that "thus, while the sun sets we love to watch the moon rise."

A bit of the author of "Truth and Fiction" was in Monsieur la Mie—"thus," as the picture of Margaret died away, it was to him "a very agreeable sensation" to behold the image of Marie loom forth.

"Who kissed Marie Minard?"

Clenching his fists, the Professor told himself that longer uncertainty in this matter was not to be endured.

CHAPTER XL.

MADAME MOREL RETURNS, MARIE MINARD EFFECTS AN ESCAPE,
AND MONSIEUR LA MIE SETS OUT FOR THE ROSE DES ALPES.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and happily such ill winds are rare, if they can be said to exist at all. While it seemed pure malice on the part of fate to suffer the curtain at the Rose des Alpes to be pushed aside just long enough for Monsieur la Mie to see Marie Minard being kissed by a gentleman, without leaving him time to detect who that gentleman was, it was benevolence pure on the part of this much-maligned deity to suffer said curtain to be accidentally pushed aside by the nondescript young woman just in time for her—a consenting party, apparently, in the misconduct of her colleague—to see without being seen their lady principal. She sounded instant alarm.

“Madame is returning; I see her! Oh, what will she say to you? Couldn’t you get behind the sofa”—this to the gentleman—“or in here?” opening a press in the wall.

The gentleman laughed. “My worthy young woman——”

“Oh, there, don’t speechify!” came the somewhat rude interruption to an address which, truth to say, began rather condescendingly. “If you won’t creep behind the sofa or into the press, here’s the door and here’s an umbrella. Go along the verandah, and down the steps, and you can get into the harbour. I’ll call you back when the coast is clear. Don’t pose, for it doesn’t impress me in the least. Go! Thank goodness!”

This as the gentleman, followed by Marie Minard,

made a somewhat precipitate exit, barely in time to escape being caught by Madame Morel, who came panting in at the opposite door.

The nondescript young woman looked pathetically forlorn and wickedly innocent.

"You alone, dear?" said the lady principal, not unkindly.

"Yes"—mournfully. Then, brightening up, "Let me take off your things, madame. Why, your bonnet is quite wet," laying it down: "and your cloak still worse," laying it on top of the bonnet.—If the nondescript young woman could be said to have one marked feature, it was a tendency to do invariably the wrong thing, with, seemingly, all the will in the world to do the right.—"How stupid of me!" she exclaimed, suddenly seeing her error, from the anguish in Madame Morel's face, and gingerly laying the bonnet on a chair by itself. "How pleased you must be you had not a long way to come! What sort of an afternoon had you, madame?"

"Charming, quite charming!" replied Madame Morel, looking into vacancy with a radiant smile, as if the recollection of certain passages were really quite overcoming.

The young woman looked and felt impressed.

"Ah, my dear, there is a woman for you. Rich! why, she's rolling in wealth, and yet—put my gloves into my bonnet, please—as simple as I am."

The person addressed nodded. This was a point on which she agreed.

"Take only her costume," continued madame, waxing eloquent with her subject, "I might almost call it shabby; then, what she set before us, frugal to a degree: only tea—with milk, not cream—and the plainest of bread and butter. With all that"—seeing a rather blank look on

the face before her, followed by one showing small appreciation of this marvellous thrift—"with all that, the indefinable something of the rich woman. You feel that she has thousands, but wishes to make no display. Did you say anything?"

"Say anything?—No." The young woman started. She had fallen into a reverie, wondering what good her wealth did Madame Roland, and why that lady did not circulate it. Could the indefinable something of the rich woman be stinginess?

"Don't lapse into that way of brooding," said Madame Morel, testily, as she looked at the puzzled face before her. "This kind of crude criticism of things which you do not understand is at bottom of all the free thought, socialism, and I know not what else, that is afloat among you young people to-day."

The nondescript one smiled. What would Marie Minard, what would her cavalier say, when they heard of the charges that she had brought on herself whilst staying behind to clear a coast for them? Truly, little all of them knew how hard would be their task, and to what curious results the hiding in the harbour was still to lead.

To return to Monsieur la Mie. When last we saw the Professor, he had made up his mind that longer uncertainty as to who had kissed Marie Minard was unendurable. It may strike the critical reader as strange that Monsieur la Mie should have been thus deeply interested in a young woman whom he had seen only thrice, and on these occasions under circumstances surely not propitious to the growth of the tender emotion. Alas! what has to be struggled against throughout this work, more especially in the parts thereof which bear on Monsieur la Mie, is—the critical reader. Be it emphatically iterated

that Monsieur la Mie was a totally anomalous being, and only by beings wholly out of the common will his peculiarly complex nature be understood. To the mass, more especially to the critical mass, he must and will remain a mystery.

To view again his position as regards Marie Minard. On the first occasion on which the Professor had met her, he had missed his footing and fallen. He had, however, picked himself up with alacrity, and whilst so doing had caught the smile on Marie's face which had decided him that she was pretty. On the second occasion on which they had met, he had surprised her contemplating, amid peals of laughter, a composition of his, at foot of which she had penned the preposterously mocking words—

“Writing disgraceful! Copy out mistakes—M. Minard.”

Far from craving his pardon for this act, she had to all appearance experienced the greatest difficulty not to succumb anew to amusement in his presence. On that occasion Monsieur la Mie had decided that Marie was more than pretty, that she was delicious. “What a laugh; what a girl!” the large-hearted man had soliloquized, and, with the picture of her fresh in his mind, had an hour after entered into his matrimonial note-book the name “Ramie Mardin”—formed by metathesis, as the reader knows, from Marie Minard—with the comment beneath, “What if I married her?” On the third and last occasion on which fate had brought them together, they had not exchanged glances, still less exchanged words. I allude to the day made memorable in the life of the Professor by a walk with Auguier junior, in the course of which that ill-advised urchin had more than once almost maddened his companion—that walk which had ended

in the Professor's seating himself on his pocket-handkerchief beside the younger Auguier perched on his milking-stool, in blissful unconsciousness that Marie Minard was sketching him, until the urchin had brought the fact to his notice in the happy manner peculiar to himself. The upshot of this inglorious expedition had been that the Professor had made up his mind never to enter another name into his note-book, "Ramie Mardin—or *nobody!*" he had said to himself. I am not sure that he did not even pen these words on the page in question.

All this, however unexplicable in itself, will explain what it was that gave the wailing tone to the Professor's voice, when—feeling Marie lost—sad at heart, he proposed to Margaret. On the other hand, having been dismissed by Margaret, was it altogether unnatural that his thoughts should revert to Marie? They did so.

Who had kissed Marie Minard? he had asked himself; and, inner consciousness evolving no satisfactory answer, he had set out for the Rose des Alpes.

CHAPTER XLI.

COMPLICATIONS BROUGHT ABOUT BY BABETTE.

MUCH as the reader might like to know at once what was the result of Monsieur la Mie's starting forth to the Rose des Alpes, I must here deal with another subject; to wit, previous complications brought about by Babette, and destined to affect to a greater or lesser degree the further career of most of my characters, not least that of Monsieur la Mie. A reference to Chapter XXII. of this narrative will show that at the time therein indicated took place one of the events of the season at Les Plans; that is to say, there arrived at that village Madame Morel and the thirteen ladies who adorned as teachers her well-known Academy. It will be remembered that the sight of these vehicles rolling in quick succession into the village, had caused the natives no small excitement, to the description of which this chapter, headed "Surprise," was mainly devoted. The circumstance, in itself seemingly trivial, that Babette, with her apron-strings flying, in her amazement rushed into the arms of a certain young man was particularly mentioned, for a reason then not named, but which may now be given; *i.e.* as bearing directly on the career of Margaret Winkelried, and, through her, as was natural, on the career of several others figuring in this work.

Babette had been given a letter of Margaret's to post. In the excitement aforesaid, it was forgotten, and remained in her pocket unthought of for days—a fact the more to be regretted that on the delivery of it depended no less a thing than the happiness of two mortals. It is wonder-

ful, indeed, the happiness of how many mortals has depended on the delivery of that small thing—a letter. It takes some courage to say so, since the mention of letters by novelists begins to be tabooed as hackneyed. Poor Babette! Had she but realized that she was ever to figure in a novel, she would possibly not have sinned so gravely as to let Margaret's happiness be all but sacrificed to so very insignificant an event as—the miscarriage of a letter. But Babette did not know this, and the painful truth remains that the increasing melancholy of Margaret, which reached its climax in the something between a sneeze and a sob heard by the Professor, just before his ignominious dismissal, was due to no grander, no more novel a circumstance, than that a certain missive was not despatched when written. Nay, from the time of her leaving Germany, those commonplace little things, letters, had played a prominent part in the romance of Margaret Winkelried. To begin with, she had not been two days in Geneva before she had written one to a gentleman of the name of Franz Bürger, of which the postscript ran as follows:—

“By the way, there is a son in the house, a professor—quite a study. You must tell me what his sister is like.”

A farthing rushlight set Moscow afire; this insignificant postscript gave rise to infinite heart-burning.

Franz Bürger was the girl's betrothed. They had celebrated their “Polterabend” (marriage eve) in the good old German style. All the cracked and broken utensils in the girl's home had been smashed on the pavement; and, needless to say, the jubilee had been preceded by that by which every home jubilee is preceded in Germany—a whole week's clean-making and fit-to-be-seen-making, house-upside-down-turning, coffee-burning, fur-

niture-beating, and preparations for eating. Somehow this kind of thing seems to run into rhyme. All went off well at first on the Polterabend, but, alas! Here let Margaret take up the story. It fell on the 2nd of January, and it had so happened that the preparations for it had not come to a close in time. There were irons going on New Year's Day. Nobody thought at the time—or if any did they kept the thought to themselves—that of all the unlucky things in all the world the most unlucky is to have irons going on New Year's Day.

At night, in the midst of the jubilee, there came a telegram, accounting for the non-arrival of the father of the bridegroom to be. It announced that he had had a fit, and had passed away. There had been clinking of glasses when the telegram had been brought in; Margaret's lover's had fallen to the ground—pure accident, but remembered afterwards.

The girl had opened the telegram. She had read it aloud. "*Passed away?*" She had looked up with dry eyes. "*Passed away?* Why, what did they mean?"

She had seemed quite stunned and stupid at first; then had been seized with trembling. Poor child! They had carried her from the room, and the visitors had crept away. So the Polterabend had ended. Strange, to attribute all this to irons going on New Year's Day. You see, they thought of that afterwards.

Thus Margaret's wedding had been postponed, this leading to the journey to Geneva. Truly, life is a medley of things sad and droll. Franz Bürger in seeing off his betrothed, was careful to place her in a ladies' compartment, and could he have had his will he would have known her surrounded by none but ladies until they met again. The more unendurable had it been to him to

learn that at 29 of the Rue de la Croix d'Or she was under the same roof with one of the other sex, a being, moreover, of the "study" type, a professor. Lovers are seldom logical, and Franz Bürger, generally speaking, not wholly brainless, was loverly-foolish enough, on receiving Margaret's letter with the postscript which it contained, to decide that life was a very poor thing—far worse than a bauble or bubble, to mention only two of the many uncomplimentary names by which it passes among the cynical: that it was a burden not to be borne with common patience in face of the circumstance that the same sun which shone on his mother and him, did not recoil from shining on other mothers with sons. In this pleasing state of mind, he had sat down and had written ten pages of foreign note to his betrothed, enlarging on the postscript to her letter. He had started with wishing her joy of her newest acquisition in the way of an object of admiration; he felt sure her professor must be a delightful person from her description of him; then remembering, possibly, that she had not described him, he broke off in the midst of this vein, and begged her not to consider that she was sparing his feelings in giving so meagre a sketch of one who must surely merit a notice of more than two lines. With reference to Mademoiselle la Mie, he was sorry not to be able to enlighten her as to what that young lady was like, but he had seen her only once, and had himself absolutely no taste for "studies." (Oh, what a blow was there!)

This letter had been the beginning of a quarrel, which had resulted in a coldness springing up between the correspondents; it, in its turn, so rapidly reaching freezing pitch, that Franz Bürger one morning went so far as to pack up all that reminded him of Margaret, telling himself in the proper heroic language that she to

him was "as one dead." Some twenty-four hours later, however, he became aware that she was no such thing, but on the contrary living and ever present, so that, do what he might, she haunted him.

"DEAR MARGARET," he had written whilst this conviction was full on him, "brute, blockhead that I have been,—may I go to you, my darling? One word to your own,
"FRANZ."

At heart he was not a bad young fellow, with all his faults; and, it having suddenly dawned on him that he had been a fool, he was not above roundly abusing himself. This letter it was the reply to which had lain forgotten for days in Babette's pocket. When that damsel discovered it there she upbraided herself not a moment, but calmly resolved to despatch it with the next budget; and accordingly did. Meanwhile two hearts were all but breaking. Not that they, happily, broke. Say what one will, the fates are not so unkind as we paint them, and in real life the slip betwixt the cup and the lip is far rarer than in fiction.

Wearied of waiting, Franz Bürger determined to face the worst, and set out for Switzerland and Les Plans. The very first man whom he met on his way to the Edelweiss was Monsieur la Mie.

CHAPTER XLII.

MODESTY AND A COLLISION.

"Civilly—by the sword."

Captain Bobadil (BEN JONSON).

UNTIL subjected to the microscopic eye, Monsieur la Mie might strike one as anything rather than extraordinarily diffident, self-effacing, and timid; but no sooner is he subjected to this test than his true nature appears. He was a peculiarly modest man. Thus he had no sooner reached the Rose des Alpes, whither he had betaken himself to ask who had kissed Marie Minard, than, his courage failing, he turned back. It was a repetition of his conduct on that walk with Auguier junior, described some chapters back, on the occasion of which he had intended to ask how matters stood with the thirteen gentlewomen at the opposite inn, what were their general pursuits, what their talks and walks. A clever writer has said that she takes curiosity to be a wholesome development of human nature, and could think highly of no one who could be long brought into connection with others without feeling interest enough to make inquiries into their history and surroundings. Monsieur la Mie, who completely shared this opinion, and acted accordingly, would have thought himself a true curmudgeon (*un Anglais, pur sang*) could he have felt indifferent regarding the ladies at the Rose des Alpes. On the other hand, having, with the intention of "making inquiries" concerning them, walked uphill for some two miles by the side of Auguier junior, that well-meaning but inexpressibly grimy and impish-looking urchin, the modesty,

which was in this remarkable man so strangely blended with enormous bias in favour of self (for, to say the truth, the one man of François la Mie's acquaintance who at all realized his ideal of man was François la Mie), caused him at the critical moment to recoil from putting the simple question: "Could you, unutterably commonplace young plebeian that you are, yet being an inmate of the Rose des Alpes, put me *au courant* with the movements of the thirteen ladies at your establishment, more especially letting me know how large a portion of their conversation revolves on me?"

Needless to say, in desiring to know who had kissed Marie Minard, the Professor built again on Auguier junior. To him he had meant to put the question, with the proper circumlocution, when, with his hand on the bell of the Rose des Alpes, it flashed on him that the wholesome development of human nature which would be set forth in this inquiry, might be misconstrued; nay, now that it came to putting the question, something in himself recoiled against the idea. He turned from the door, but not to return to the Edelweiss; no. It was still pouring rain. I confess I feel almost ashamed of repeating this statement. On looking back over my story, I find that it has in it been pouring rain for no less than thirteen chapters—a case, no doubt, unparalleled in respectable fiction. Monsieur la Mie felt himself an injured man; not so grievously wronged that he for one moment contemplating putting an end to himself, but sufficiently "pained" (to use a pathetic expression) to make him resolve to go forth into the rain and do himself as much harm in a small way as possible. This resolution it was that caused him a few minutes later to meet Franz Bürger—"meet" in the most literal, lexical

meaning of "to come together, to join;" for, both of the gentlemen walking with umbrellas held in front, both of them walking at top speed, and both of them at the same distance from the right and left of the road, it so happened that their umbrellas collided. It was a most aggravating collision—the more so that, like most harmful collisions, it was the result of what journalists love to call "the most reprehensible negligence;" in fact, one of those collisions which, from the point of an outsider, utterly ignorant of the exigencies of fate, need not have been. The man who declines to believe that in the stars it was written (to use an expression, perhaps, a trifle highflown) that the umbrellas of Messrs. la Mie and Bürger, were, on this particular occasion, to dash together and clash—the sceptic, the hard-headed, matter-of-fact individual will exclaim, "Fate indeed! Spare me with Fate; and tell me how, in the name of all that is rational, came two gentlemen, beings of the logical sex, endowed each with fifty ounces of brain, exposed to one rain, and walking in different directions, to be both of them holding their umbrellas *in front of them*? Must it not appear that one had the fixed intention of extinguishing the other?"

It must. I admit that appearances lean that way. None the less be it maintained that nothing was further from the minds of Messrs. la Mie and Bürger than extinction of one another. It was the Professor who had carried his umbrella aimed at the wrong point. Perhaps he did so purposely, intending to expose himself as much as possible to the inclemency of the weather, whilst by his opened umbrella bearing testimony to himself and the world at large that he could, had he been so minded, have protected himself. Perhaps, being in a

supremely agitated state of mind, he had come to the wrong conclusion as to which of the cardinal points the rain came from; *perhaps* (this I myself think most likely), with the cynicism of a bruised and disappointed mortal, he desired to commune with himself alone *al fresco*, and carried his umbrella thus to shut out behind its expanse of silk and whalebone every glimpse of that sky that could overshadow a world containing women—sweet women—of whom he had not the monopoly.

Whatever the cause, it was he who with his umbrella pierced that of Franz Bürger. *Tableau!*

Two women, finding themselves in such a predicament, their umbrellas joined together like Siamese twins, would have dropped them, while yet united, to abuse each other, or else to assure each other that the thing did not matter at all—was, in fact, rather a pleasing accident. But we have not to deal with two women, but with two men, and, moreover, with a Frenchman and a German. With their umbrellas like a shield between them, neither Monsieur la Mie nor Franz Bürger loosed his hold of the stick. Each of them felt absurd and experienced the wish, common to men all over the world when thus feeling, to vanish into space. Neither was able to do anything of the kind, “for this plain reason,” to borrow the poet’s argument, “*man is not a fly.*” For a full minute they stood irresolute how to act; then Monsieur la Mie, as the aggressor, furiously dislodged his umbrella-stick and was about to apologize with grave *hauteur*, as beseems a man who feels that he has to free his character from the blot of absurdity, when, with the suddenness of an inspiration, the conviction seized him—

This was the individual who had kissed Marie Minard!

Oddly enough, in the very same instant the idea seized Franz Bürger—

This was the “son,” the Professor, the—“study.”

To every nation its gift. The French have the honour of having brought to its highest perfection the art of being absurd.

“Monsieur,” said François la Mie,” raising his hat, and holding it at that angle which denotes “your lordship’s most humble, most devoted servant,” “I should apologize to you, but that for certain reasons I experience very exquisite pleasure at having caused you if only a second’s discomfort.”

Franz Bürger was a German; and Germans have the name of taking life in earnest, whatever its aspect. He totally failed to relish the spectacle offered by the Frenchman, delivering himself, bareheaded amid the rain, of a speech in its mysterious mixture of courtesy and insolence so supremely ridiculous. Without pausing for one moment to reflect that here must be some error, he replied, hotly—

“Upon my word, you are facetious, sir. I am to understand, no doubt, that had you plunged your ill-starred umbrella-stick into my eye instead of where you did, your delight would have been extreme!”

Monsieur la Mie made no reply in words, but replaced his hat with that smile which says what in a certain story Mr. Lovelace says to Lady Betty—

“Charmingly hit—you have it.”

After this the gentlemen exchanged cards, and the duel was fixed for the next day but one.

So much for certain dear neighbours and their way of solving difficulties.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A GENTLEMAN'S ARM.

It is odd and completely past the range of a woman's comprehension, that two men who have made up their minds to despatch one the other, having worked themselves up to a pitch of indignation in which they decide that the world which contains the one cannot contain the other—men with death, beckoned forth by themselves, treading on their heels—should be able calmly to discuss the news and the state of the weather. Yet so it is. The duel above mentioned having been arranged between Monsieur la Mie and Franz Bürger, they entered the village together. Franz Bürger, who had thrown the gauntlet and seen it lifted, asked of Monsieur la Mie would he be good enough to show him the way to the Edelweiss; and Monsieur la Mie, who had provoked the other to challenge him, declared that nothing could give him greater pleasure than to act as his guide to whatever part of the globe he might mention. After which, with great alacrity and much seeming good-will, as implied in countless civilities exchanged on the way, the strange couple made for the inn.

It would be absurd to compare two nineteenth-century gentlemen to Undine, or any of her tribe; but indeed, as Messrs. la Mie and Bürger rather floated—or, let us say, swam—than walked past the Rose des Alpes on their way to the Edelweiss, amid rain descending in streamlets from their umbrellas, one instinctively thought of the fabled race of water-sprites. Monsieur la Mie was halting before an arbour belonging to the Rose des Alpes,

thinking, as he afterwards said, that had he for his part, had any voice in the matter of this deluge, he would certainly have appointed it to come after him and his son, when,—just as he was frantically wheeling his umbrella round, with a view to shaking off it some of the weight of fluid,—he heard a laugh—a laugh that he would have known among a thousand, though one that he had only once before heard, in a scholastic apartment. It was Marie again—could only be she. He peered through the foliage. Yes, positively. There in the arbour, pressed into a dark corner, and thinking herself, no doubt, unseen, was Marie, with—oh, horror!—round her waist a gentleman's sleeve, and bending over her—oh, impropriety!—a gentleman's hat.

Poor Monsieur la Mie groaned.

"What do you see?" asked the German.

"The house you seek is opposite," replied the Professor, rather irrelevantly, and turning round to point to it. "That is the Edelweiss gleaming through the trees." All this he said in the tone of voice known to readers of fiction as "husky."

"Thank you." Franz Bürger paused. He was aware that Monsieur la Mie also lodged at the Edelweiss. "You are surely not going to stay out in weather like this?" he said, with the marked solicitude which a man naturally feels for the health of another whom he hopes to have the privilege of himself shortly despatching.

"Thank *you*. I have business at the post-office, and think of taking a stroll," replied Monsieur la Mie, stiffly, as though it were the most natural thing in the world for a man to take a "stroll" in weather like this. "We shall probably meet again this evening at supper. For the present, I have the honour to wish you good morning."

For a moment two hats were held at opposite angles, and so they parted.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BEAUREGARD EPISODE.—EUGÉNIE SETS HER LAST SNARE.

It was told at an early period of this story how a gentleman with no less high-sounding a name than Beauregard de Belendroit had greatly flattered the pride of Madame la Mie by asking the hand of her daughter in marriage. It was also there told how great was the indignation of Madame la Mie on her daughter's flatly refusing to avail herself of the honour thus held out to her. As bearing directly on what has now to be told, it must be narrated how Monsieur Beauregard de Belendroit came to stoop so low as to seek a wife in a family, which, albeit boasting of a genius among its members, could not be said to be on a social equality with his. Such a marriage might pass in imperial Berlin or in London, but in a good republican city like Geneva *mésalliances* are not tolerated.

The reason of this strange proceeding on the part of Monsieur Beauregard was that, having met Nicolette la Mie at a party, he had been sufficiently struck by the girl's appearance and manner to discuss her with much freedom a few days later at the restaurant St. Julien, winding up with the somewhat incoherent boast (result of mine host's very excellent wine, which he had imbibed too freely) that he had reason to believe that the admiration was mutual. It was unfortunate for Monsieur Beauregard that, besides not having a very strong head, he was short-sighted to a degree. Had this not been so,

he could not but have observed that among those present on the occasion of his thus vaunting, was Nicolette's brother. The latter went up to him, and looking very keenly into his eyes, said—

“You are not so inebriated, monsieur, but that you will understand me when I tell you that you are—a liar and a braggart. Be good enough now to take your choice between duelling with me, or proposing to the girl whose name you dare to link with yours; giving to me in writing her answer—‘rejected’ or ‘accepted.’”

There was a general hush until Monsieur Beauregard replied, which he did at last, insolently, with his peculiar smile—to the effect that, given his choice between death—possible—and a pretty wife—past a doubt—he could but choose the latter alternative. His expression underwent some change, when, having finished speaking, he met the gaze of Monsieur la Mie. Extending his hand, in a curve, as was his fashion, he added, “Fair play, of course. I rely on fair play, and on mademoiselle's choice not being influenced. Your hand on that.”

Monsieur la Mie had crossed his arms behind his back. “My word of honour to you, and to these gentlemen. My sister shall not be tampered with. As for your hand, you must excuse my taking it until—until it has been accepted by her.”

And wishing the company good evening, the Professor had left the place.

Had Madame la Mie known of this scene, her pride would have doubtless not been so great as it was on receiving next day a letter from Monsieur Beauregard, asking permission to wait on mademoiselle. She knew nothing of it, however, and affably consented. All the greater was Monsieur Beauregard's mortification when

Nicolette dismissed him, not unkindly, but with the comment that she was sorry to pain one whom she believed to be a friend, and knew to be an old acquaintance, of her brother's. All this with infinite grace and perfect self-possession.

Monsieur Beauregard listened, fairly stunned, and, against the girl had finished, she struck him as adorable. Nay, this idea seized him so suddenly that he did not seek for words to give it utterance, exclaiming, infelicitously enough, as he started to his feet—

“Why, now I declare I love you, upon my word I do, mademoiselle!”

The girl changed colour. “*Now!* and to what am I, then, indebted for your proposal before? Stay”—as Monsieur Beauregard smiled weakly—“have the goodness to explain yourself to my brother;” and, opening a door leading into an inner room, with flashing eyes she summoned her brother. “Am I to understand, François, that you and my mother countenance this person’s proposing to me for pastime? I should not have accepted him under any circumstances;—as far as I now can see, his proposal was a mere jest.”

The tears were very near coming as she reached this point. François saw it, and gently led the angry girl from the room.

As for Monsieur Beauregard, he had thrown himself into an easy-chair, when the Professor returned.

“I suppose you see that you have had—fair play,” the latter said coldly. “Have the kindness now, as agreed, to write the result of your suit on this slip of paper. That desk is at your service. The simple word ‘rejected’ or ‘accepted,’ as the case may be, with your

signature in full beneath, will be sufficient. Nay! not with pencil," as Monsieur Beauregard produced a diminutive crayon from his pocket.

"*Peste!* Will you pass me that inkpot, then?"

"*No.*"

The negative adverb is painfully short; and in French, with the nasal letter before and after its solitary vowel, it has a peculiarly uncompromising sound. The Professor, moreover, used no form of address, an omission even more striking in French than in English.

Monsieur Beauregard looked at the inkpot, much as a thwarted urchin might; then rose and crossed the room with as bad a grace as ill temper and petulant movement might be supposed to lend to a walk at all times shambling. At the desk he wrote the words, "*Rejected.—Bernard Beauregard de Belendroit,*" on the paper given to him by the Professor, and a minute after left the room. It would have afforded him the greatest pleasure before doing so to hurl the inkpot at Monsieur la Mie, much as Luther hurled his inkpot at the arch-fiend. Not being able to do anything of the kind, he wished the Professor good morning, adding between his teeth an imprecation, brief but pithy, in which was somewhat discourteously invoked the name of the being so strangely associated with the rage of the German reformer.

From that day up to the time with which this chapter deals, Monsieur la Mie and Monsieur Beauregard had not again met. Fate saw fit to bring them together once more exactly one hour after Monsieur la Mie and Franz Bürger had wished each other "Good evening" with that punctilious politeness and that studied salute which marks partings between civilized beings all the world over when they feel most uncivil.

When Monsieur la Mie had settled his business at the post, and set out on what he was pleased to call his "stroll," he felt about as miserable as man can feel; so totally wretched, indeed, that he was fain to sit down on the stump of a tree. Here seated, a vision of fair women passed before his inner eye, each—therein lay the bitterness—escorted by a gentleman. Not to mention Blanche and Lily, who had disappointed him by marrying prior to the date of this story—he had never hoped to lead either of them to the altar; but that they should have found it in their hearts to marry any other gave him none the less a pang; not to dwell on Pâquerette and Loulou, who, to his chagrin, had married since the date of this story—not that his cheerfulness suffered any lasting blight from the circumstance, else had Pâquerette and Loulou herein heretofore been mentioned;—there passed before his mental eye Margaret, with Franz, that Franz not he; Marie, with about her waist a gentleman's sleeve, that sleeve not his. "It is enough to make one cry," he muttered; but, I have pleasure in adding, he did not cry, this sparing me the harrowing task of having to describe him with the tears slowly coursing down his cheeks, which, for aught I know, might call forth peals of laughter from a hardened British reading public. He produced a voluminous pocket-handkerchief, not to apply it to his eyes, but to tie it round his neck; and was just weighing the advisability of returning to the Edelweiss in view of the penetrating damp, when a rustle behind him startled him.

"Eugénie!"

Yes, it was Eugénie. In waterproof, with a hood over her head, she stood looking at him. It would have given Eugénie lifelong triumph to have brought her

master to her feet; and in another instant François la Mie would have been entrapped. He approached the girl, when Fate interposed in her most piquant way, and played him a good turn by means of his enemy.

Monsieur Beauregard walked up. "You are perhaps not aware, Professor," he said, measuring with his eyes the disconcerted scholar, "that Mademoiselle Roland is my betrothed. Be good enough, now that you know the fact, to bear it in mind."

"Most certainly." Monsieur la Mie was himself again in a minute. "Your betrothed—indeed? Might I suggest your reminding *mademoiselle* of the fact?"

"Sir!" Monsieur Beauregard turned pale; but he did not lift the gauntlet. Next moment he and Eugénie were alone.

"*Mon ami,*" said the girl, with her curious smile, "*you are a coward!* Nay, do not speak; it does not matter; nothing matters now. I am, as you said, your betrothed." And without further word or greeting, she linked her arm in his.

CHAPTER XLV.

MONSIEUR LA MIE LOOKS BEFORE AND AFTER.—PAUL PRY.

HAVING, shortly after the meeting described in last chapter, returned to the Edelweiss, Monsieur la Mie straightway betook himself to his room. There he changed his out-of-door garb for a dressing-gown, and, having ordered a cup of Frau Metzle's aromatic tea, sat and sipped it, whilst perusing an unpublished work by a favourite writer of his—François la Mie. The sentiments therein expressed were mostly tinged with deep melancholy, this suiting the Professor's mood admirably. In reading one or two passages, he was, however, painfully struck by their comparative cheerfulness, which seemed to imply that the blighted being, their author, had known snatches of bliss in his life. He smiled sadly as this thought flashed on him, and, with it fresh in his mind, penned some pungent marginal notes to the passages in question, which, indeed, he would have unhesitatingly confiscated, but that his displeasure at the frivolous state of mind which, in his present disposition, they seemed to him to indicate, was modified by very natural pride at the extreme neatness of the language in which they were clothed. Finally, putting the manuscript from him, Monsieur la Mie leant his arms on the table and gave himself up to thought, holding, as was his custom, when in a melancholy vein like this, a review of all his sorrows past. The result of so doing is soothing, though the process in itself is a trifle methodical,

and in that respect may recommend itself perhaps less strongly to the English mind than to the French. Instead of contenting himself with grieving for Marie lost—and among the host of damsels who had of late occupied the thoughts of the Professor, Marie, the one of whom he had seen least, was the one of whom he had thought most—he first fell to bewailing the “desertion” of Margaret; for whom, beyond common liking, flashing now and then into admiration, he had never cherished any feeling, but concerning whom it had pleased him to think that she cared for him to a degree excluding the possibility of her tolerating any one else. After this, he lashed himself into wrath at the “treachery” of Eugénie, for whom he had hitherto felt downright dislike; varied that too, of course, by fits of admiration,—whilst regarding her, equally, it had gratified him to fancy that she was so fully in love with him as to doom to annihilation any other suitor for her hand. Last of all, and as crowning offender, he summoned up the image of Marie, with a gentleman’s hat bending over her and a gentleman’s sleeve about her. That Monsieur la Mie put a head in the hat, and an arm in the sleeve need not be said. That he could not give a name to them added to his misery. He had challenged the wrong man, a harmless casual visitor to the place; whilst of the man with whom of all others he would like to pick a quarrel, he had seen only the hat and sleeve.

Yes, Marie was the crowning offender. Her he could never forgive. If you came to pressing the point, he *did* forgive Margaret. She had shown pitiable taste to refuse his offer; still, he had never pretended to love her. If you came to urging the matter, he *did* forgive Eugénie. She had fallen in his eyes from a height which had

never been great; still, in her case, too, he had never pretended to love.

With Marie it was different. A small, still voice had whispered to Monsieur la Mie for weeks past, "This was more than a passing fancy; this was a *grande passion*." He had felt that he really loved Marie.

Most men who have had a feeling like this, and a good many have had such a feeling in their day, have imagined that the woman concerned must divine it. So the Professor. Monsieur la Mie, having spoken to Marie twice and thought of her twice a hundred times, deemed this ample reason for him to feel aggrieved on being made aware that she, far from adapting her life to his feelings, had actually, in defiance of them, submitted to be embraced by another. Oh that he had but seen that culprit's face! Oh that his agitation—or was it a feeling of delicacy?—had not prompted him to start back on seeing the sombre masculine garb defined against the light apparel of the faithless one! Yes, faithless! So he did not hesitate to stigmatize the first woman whom he had loved with a capital *L*; and who, instead of feeling that her fate was sealed in his, and experiencing repugnance at the touch of any other, seeing in him the only possible he, had—— Phaw! it was too abominable. Monsieur la Mie had believed in spiritual affinity; had believed in the rushing together of two souls; had believed that to be certain that he loved a woman was to be certain that that woman loved him; and now—he covered his face with his hands. This was the woman beneath whose name, on the occasion of their last meeting, when she had rather charmed than vexed him by her merry trick, he had written with severe simplicity

what he had as yet written beneath no name entered into that marvellous compilation of his—

“*She pleases me. I will marry her.*”

Well might the Professor's feelings, as he thought over all this, become too much for him. He rose and paced the room. It was a small one. The rooms at the Edelweiss were none of them large. For Monsieur la Mie alone it would have been spacious enough; but it was not sufficiently large to give scope to him and his sorrow, especially now that he “paced” it. A man in his hours of ease takes ordinary footsteps; when pain and anguish wring the brow, it is his impulse to stride. The Professor strode. Well, any reader, who is not downright heartless, will feel with him when told that, just as he was taking a specially grandiose step, in the direction of the door, which was at the same time the window, his foot coming in somewhat violent contact with a panel, the door flew open. There was absolutely no witness of the affair but a mountain rising before the house, a link in that mighty chain of Alps of which Michelet has said, that they seem for ever mocking man. Monsieur la Mie, who held the same opinion, resolved that have the laugh on its side the mountain this time should not. He was not the man to confess even to Nature that he had made a *faux pas*. Accordingly, he had no sooner regained his equilibrium, temporarily lost, then, looking up as though he had thus suddenly marched through the door for the sole purpose of studying the landscape, he satisfied himself that the expression worn by the whole mountain-range was the same as usual—one of unfathomable calm, untouched by any suggestion of a sneer. Howbeit, to clear himself completely from any suspicion

of the ludicrous, Monsieur la Mie took a little walk along the covered verandah into which led the door of his room and of an unoccupied room next to it. A man of less curiously delicate susceptibilities than the Professor would not have deemed it necessary, perhaps, to undertake this perambulation, in pure deference to what might be the conclusions drawn by a staid old mountain from a false step of his. There are among us many who may remember having, in fits of absence of mind, lifted a foot to the height of another step at the top of a flight; the thing is embarrassing, though only the door-knocker be a witness of it, and one or two of us, I will venture to say, have felt ourselves seriously compromised,—if only with the door-knocker. Few of us have, however, had presence of mind to make good the position, as Monsieur la Mie would have done; who, he so placed, would have contemplated the foot unnecessarily raised with a “one, two, button-my-shoe” expression perfectly spontaneous, and then would have either really buttoned his shoe, or, supposing this not possible, would have whipped out his pocket-handkerchief and brushed away a speck of dust, real or imaginary, from the lifted foot, thus forestalling a smile at his expense,—if only on the part of the door-knocker.

May I submit that in these little traits we see the man of genius as contrasted with him of the common herd.

Monsieur la Mie was about to return to his room, finding it, perhaps, rather hard to walk with a business-like air in a morning-gown, and with zephyr playing in his locks, when he heard, proceeding from “the unoccupied” room, of all unearthly sounds, a kiss.

He turned. A hero of the proper type would not have turned. He would, by some marvellous combina-

tion of circumstances, have seen without turning, have beheld without wishing to behold, or else he would *not* have seen, because without turning he could not see, and, whilst longing to see, he would not turn.

I must say I myself greatly admire this kind of man, in the abstract; it has not been my lot to come across him in reality yet. Monsieur la Mie, be it repeated, turned. He did more. He promenaded the length of the verandah with a would-be casual air, his sole purpose in so doing being to dart a glance on his return into the room aforesaid.

This is, of course, a kind of being which every one must, in the abstract, abhor; but whether it would be compatible with wisdom or Christian charity to let this feeling carry one so far as to make one refuse to breathe the same air with him is doubtful. Toleration is begged for in the case of Monsieur la Mie. What he saw in the one-sixtieth part of a minute which it took him to shoot a glance into the room, was a picture so very pretty that I am tempted to reproduce it here. This I do, however, with the preliminary remark that beings who lift their hands in horror at that lamentable weakness in my hero, which caused him not to shut his eyes and ears upon first hearing the salute with the lips above mentioned, will do well to skip the next paragraph, rather than by reading what therein will be told in a manner constitute themselves accomplices in the guilt of the too-inquisitive scholar.

Monsieur la Mie saw—two heads, one raised, one bending: the bending head, the man's, with fair hair brushed back from a broad white forehead; the raised head, the woman's, fair, with the same white forehead; four blue eyes meeting, and a blonde moustache that

went near to touch sweet, red lips—lips that were made to say “Ach!”

Goethe would have made an idyll of it, and called it “Begegnung.” Monsieur la Mie, our poet, only said, “*Joli, ça!*” and, being a gentleman, though with a bit of Paul Pry in his composition, discreetly withdrew.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MAINLY A DISCOURSE ON WOMEN'S MEN.

THE first thing Monsieur la Mie did, when he returned this time to his room, was to sound a low, thoughtful whistle. Then he threw himself on a chair, placed back to front, and thus affording a support for his arms. Another low whistle. He had picked a quarrel with the wrong person, that much was more plain to him than ever. He frowned. There are few things more aggravating to a well-regulated mind than this consciousness, and Monsieur la Mie was the owner of an eminently well-regulated mind.

To tread again the ground which he had just trod. To begin with, startled by the sound of laughter emanating from a certain arbour, he had peeped into the same. The reader of captious disposition may remark that the Professor seemed given to peeping; and, as a true chronicler, I am bound to admit that he did indeed at all times make full use of his eyes. I just recall his once saying to me, on my mildly drawing his attention to this fact, that to it he owed his almost boundless knowledge of human nature; that he had made it his

rule, as a student of natural phenomena, at no time to spare himself the trouble of following up a mystery, however small, however great. As he said the word "small" he placed his hands together, and spoke in a little fluting voice; as he said "great" he spread out both his arms, and his voice swelled with the word. These details are merely mentioned as showing the sort of man he was. When he had done speaking, his expression was pensive, as he sat looking into space, having relapsed into his favourite pose, his hands clasped, with the forefingers extended. I felt much impressed, and trust that any reader who, like me, may at moments have suspected the Professor of conduct bordering on the inquisitive, not to say prying, will change his standpoint, and view this curious man as actuated throughout his career by something higher far than common curiosity. Having, as narrated, satisfied himself on the occasion of the arbour-episode by the somewhat undignified but time-old process of peeping, that the laughter indeed proceeded from Marie, and that Marie had round her waist a gentleman's sleeve, Monsieur la Mie gave himself up to despair—the more so that he had not the faintest idea who the owner of the sleeve could be. In vain he mentally ran over that portion of the male population of Les Plans with which he had come in contact. As the reader knows, it comprised few members. It has been to me now and then a matter of regret that so few of the male sex should figure in this work, mainly treating though it does of one gentleman. The reader is earnestly requested to bear in mind that that one was essentially a woman's man; and a woman's man, as all the world knows, is never a man's man; nay, by men is mostly considered a poor kind of man, a deteriorated sprig of the good old stem of man

—though why so is a mystery, in face of the incontrovertible fact that when Adam delved and Eve span, the only man in the world, the first and most perfect man, was a woman's man. Was Adam, one asks, when completed, submitted to the approbation of another—man? Mercifully not. Have we not herein a tacit admission that unprejudiced woman is the only proper judge of man? Assuredly. Is it not, nevertheless, a notorious fact that no sooner does she, availing herself of her time-old right, pronounce on one of the opposite sex than his fellow-men decry him? One tries in vain to account for this. One thinks of envy, hatred, and malice, and wonders vaguely could they be remotely connected with it; and then one sighs, because one knows that no man would admit the bare possibility of such a thing, which makes it waste of astuteness to suggest it.

Wherever Monsieur la Mie was, ladies were; and wherever Monsieur la Mie was, gentlemen were not. From ladies the praise of him was boundless; from them the mere sight of him raising his hat was enough to elicit the exclamations—"A dream!" "A poem!" "Darling man!" Call this infatuation; and descend a grade lower, and take what the landladies, what the mother, the waiting-maid of one of the landladies said. Frau Metzle declared that he was a house full of boarders, guaranteed, "without any of your green shutters, too." Madame Auguier obscurely remarked that he filled two boarding-houses, and was enough to justify any one's starting a third. Frau Metzle's mother, chary of eulogy, had been heard to say, "Rather a modern gentleman, yet, mind you, I like him." Frau Metzle's handmaid, on being asked her opinion of him, had blurted out, "Oh, then,

what should *I* know about so fine a gentleman?"—with a blush, and a smile and a dimple.

Compare with these some remarks overheard from the gentlemen.

Captain Macnab: "At your time of life too, Olympia! What, in heaven's name, can you see in such a harlequin?"

Monsieur Beauregard: "Tears, Eugénie? Was he so dear as all that?"

Mr. Luscombe-Binns, senior (infelicitous as usual): "Knows a pretty girl from a plain one, at all events. Doesn't seem to take much to you, Ottie, does he, my lass?"

Mr. Juan Luscombe-Binns (meant to be facetious): "Oh, charbing, charbing! other bortals hide their dibinished heads."

Franz Bürger: "So this is the Professor? Well, what will the women admire *next*?"

To which fragments add the following:—Monsieur Meunier (the bearded, ever-twinkling charioteer, proud owner of a matchless steed): "Pooh! give *me* his mother. She's three times the man that he is!"

Monsieur Louis Auguier (with a significant, introspective gaze): "I think *I* know what it is in him that fascinates. I myself—— Well, well, it might seem like boasting. Heaven grant that he may hold out till the end of the season."

The above expressions in their disjointed form read rather like the disembodied phrases commonly entitled "opinions of the press." They are given in this manner to show the reader, in close juxtaposition, the opinions of both sexes on my hero; those of the female sex un-animously favourable, those of the male sex uniformly

slighting. As regards the one exception afforded in the case of Monsieur Louis Auguier, it were useless to try to conceal that he, in not deprecating the Professor, was merely paying himself a compliment; for the reader probably already knows that, if in no other matter Monsieur Louis Auguier agreed with his younger brother, he was of one opinion with him in this—that between himself and the Professor there existed one of those curious inner resemblances, based in a fraternity of mind and heart (especially heart) not altogether uncommon between man and man, and yet, as often as they occur, peculiarly pleasing.

To return to the unhappy poet. When we left him, he was occupied in reviewing the few other gentlemen who with him had taken up a temporary residence at Les Plans, in doing which he was actuated by a motive which probably, since the world began, never yet actuated a gentleman, much less a scholar. Perhaps this is not an unfitting moment to say that I have sometimes, in the course of inditing this narrative, trembled when obliged to follow my hero to the brink of the ludicrous; not for myself, but for him. At such times I have in thought heard the cry of the illiterate, "Him a hero!" and the answering cry of them more versed in Murray, "A hero, he!" and on each and all of these occasions I have felt precisely as I feel now, and have, if my memory do not deceive me, taken pitiful refuge in a discursive paragraph, bearing on absolutely nothing but my then state of mind.

Since it must be told, what prompted Monsieur la Mie to hold a review of his fellow-residents at Les Plans was briefly this: to find among them one with an arm that would fit the sleeve which he had seen in the arbour.

Essentially small the thing does seem, and wholly unworthy of occupying a mighty brain. Be it said that it was this very thought which added bitterness to the Professor's mood. He gnashed his teeth as he reflected on the folly of which he had been guilty in drawing back at sight of that dark cloth. There was, he knew, a hopelessness connected with trying to trace a sleeve to its owner. This had been a black one—yes, he could swear to that; but, not if put upon the rack, could he have said of what material? He did not think it had been alpaca; he rather fancied it had been some kind of cloth. But all that was vague: there are so many kinds of cloth. Had it had a cuff? Had it been bound with velvet or braid? Had it had a button? It was curious to follow the workings of Monsieur la Mie's face as he asked himself these questions, and, memory affording no reply, succumbed to melancholy, the more profound that, as he thought over his position, it struck him forcibly that with the pathos of it was mingled a touch of the absurd which threw him upon himself for sympathy.

It has been remarked, in one of the many books which have lately appeared upon John Bull and his ways, that whereas Frenchmen prettily confide to the maternal ear the various adventures and mishaps which occur to them on their sentimental journeys, Englishmen, more reticent, say not a word to their mothers of these little trips. Nothing, perhaps, could be more true; and certain it is, no Englishman keeping a note-book such as that kept by Monsieur la Mie, would have submitted it to the parental eye, as did—Monsieur la Mie. Neither, probably, would any Englishman who had fallen in love with the very woman towards whom of all others his mother desired him to remain indifferent, have kept that

lady informed of the course which in this case his true love was running, as did—Monsieur la Mie; for not a meeting between him and Marie Minard had taken place but had been circumstantially described by him to Madame. None the less is it true that there are bounds even to French confidingness; and what added a poignancy to Monsieur la Mie's anguish just now was, that he felt not even from his "*petite mère*" (so, with gentle irony, he called his mother) could he expect sympathy. With woman's impatience, she would at once exclaim, "What was the *man* like? Was he tall or short, dark or fair, old or young? What! you only saw his sleeve? A pretty story!" and then she would whisk her pocket-handkerchief out of her coat-tail pocket, mop her face, and succumb to laughter. He saw this all mentally, and the expression of misery on his face deepened, making him look, if possible, more picturesque than before; and it is, I think, generally acknowledged that there is something undeniably picturesque in all Frenchmen when in a tragic mood. Of Englishmen, asking their pardon, this cannot be said. They afford much the same spectacle when in sorrow as when in joy; a touch of light, a touch of shade marks all the difference. The entire man is never altered. With a Frenchman every feeling works a transformation. When he is glad, he becomes a monument to joy, smiling all over (his very boots really seem to catch a pleased expression); when sad, in like manner, he becomes a monument to grief. The reason of this, no doubt, is that he feels nothing by halves; that the smallest emotion with him becomes a fine frenzy. He can assume a suicidal expression with ease, because a small thing makes him feel suicidal; he invokes heaven and earth to wit-

ness his every annoyance; is at home in the language of gesture; beats his breast, his brow, as naturally off the stage as on it; paces "wildly" out of fiction as well as in it; darts and starts with perfect spontaneity; knows to perfection how to modulate his voice; and last, not least—"tremblingly alive all o'er," like Pope's impossible man—he can, and does upon occasion, shed the "manly tear," which in England, alas! is all but relegated to fiction. In a word, while he has in him that which makes it easy for him to look, as necessity bids, weirdly fierce or grandiosely glum, the utmost to which John Bull (to our shame be it said) ever attains is to wearing when pleased an air which makes him look normally genial, with a touch of something which seems to say, "It's my own pleasure, mark you, mine and my wife's; and though we don't mind sharing it with a few of the family circle, we don't care to go beyond that;" while, when grieved, in like manner, instead of ingenuously enlisting the sympathies of a world at large, he wears a look of ferocious misery, which, if one may be pardoned for saying so, gives him, more than anything else, the appearance of one who, knowing himself too clumsy to cope with fate, feels he would much enjoy quietly punching his neighbour's head.

All this in passing.

Either Monsieur la Mie's emotions, such as they had been, were of that kind which, like "things" in the well-known poem, are not "what they seem," or else (this the conclusion which one prefers to draw) they were too strong to last; for he suddenly threw up his hands in resignation, after having for some ten minutes pondered on the peculiar pathos of his position—betrayed by a multiplicity of women; bound in honour to duel with a man whom, in face of the newest discoveries, to use a

scientific expression, he knew to be guiltless of the act for which he had challenged him; and ignorant of the very name of him against whom of all others he felt most enraged. Resolving to let affairs now take their own course, he raised his eyes to the one article of luxury supplied him by his landlady, a clock, the Swishest of Swiss, inasmuch as offering to view, like the child of the period, the smallest possible face in the largest possible frame.

"Seven already! Why, the supper-bell will ring in no time!" So exclaiming, Monsieur la Mie, I was going to say, darted into his dressing-room; but truth, which throughout this story has been my guide, compels me to admit that my hero had no dressing-room. In the one modest apartment which served him as bedroom, dressing-room, and study, we must at this point leave him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

BOARDING-HOUSE PARTY ON A RAINY EVENING.—DIE ASKS,
"MAY I DRESS UP?"

It was not seven o'clock, but only six. That a gentleman in an extremely perturbed state of mind, looking at a clock with a specially small face, should mistake one Roman figure for another is conceivable, and I am heartily glad that he did so, because it will show the reader that Monsieur la Mie was indeed carried away by emotion, whereas that idea may not have been conveyed quite as clearly in these pages as one would desire. More than once in writing this story I have had the feeling that my pen fails in giving to the portrait of the

Professor that perfection of light and shade, especially shade, which made of him, in joy and sorrow, to those who knew him, a spectacle at once so curious and so interesting. Moreover, it is as well, perhaps, that the little mistake concerning the time occurred, as it affords us the opportunity of spending an hour in the dining-room in company with the other inmates of the Edelweiss, of whom we have for some time past lost sight.

Some pages back circumstances over which I cannot truthfully say I had no control, led to my being obliged to describe a scene which, had it been reproduced with a paint-brush on canvas, might have been called, with the brevity which marks the wit of art-catalogues, "Boarding-house party on a rainy forenoon." The one incident which on the said forenoon formed a break in the prevailing glumness, was the temporary consternation testified by Monsieur la Mie on Captain Macnab's conceiving the unhappy idea to improve the gloomy hour by narrating a dismal anecdote. The ladies, as the reader may remember, were all of them more or less busy renovating damaged wearing apparel of a nature sufficiently ornamental to admit of its production in the presence of gentlemen. Silence and despondency reigned supreme, as was to be expected in view of the state of the weather and the time of day.

As a foil to this picture, in which of necessity subdued tints prevailed, be there now given one dealing with a livelier theme, and which, for brevity's sake again, may be called, "Boarding-house party on a rainy evening." Personages:—fourteen people, all of them subjected to the same restrictions as captives in a primitive boarding-house in a diminutive health-resort—for so, in a whisper, one might perhaps call the Pension Edelweiss.

The devices on which they have hit for killing time are as follows. Madame la Mie reads a book to herself, shaking with grim laughter, partly because the book amuses her, but more because she thinks it so truly funny that her son should have thought to deceive her by prefixing a *nom de guerre* to these sketches, in every line, nay, in every word of which she recognizes his turn of thought and language. Not that she means to say anything more about it to him—*je vous en prie!* though it is indeed a pity he has this mania for writing anonymously. Not far from her Miss Macnab is seated, painting, as usual, in sepia, or, to be more accurate, with a painting in sepia before her, to which she has just put the last stroke, and which she now contemplates with her head on one side—the pose, by the way, approved by Leonardo da Vinci—and one eye shut, the more to concentrate the sight of the other, while she switches her brush in a glass of water. She rather wishes the paper had not “bulged” quite so much, and that the trunk and branches of a tree, which in an unhappy moment she conceived the bold idea of planting on a mountain-peak, had not run into one black mass, standing out with unwarrantable clearness from a background of clouds. On the whole, however, she is satisfied with her work, and smiles archly (you can fancy Miss Macnab smiling archly) at a portion of it in which two tourists are represented—a lady and a gentleman. An asterisk between the heads of this couple, like a fallen star become stationary, has a corresponding mark on the margin, with beside it in very small print, “*One of these is me, dear.*” Needless to say, this picture is not intended to be hung at the Edelweiss, but for immediate transportation by the post to the sister of darling Janet. At a safe distance from Olympia sits

her brother, the captain. He has been doing a sum in his head. Having learnt from Auguier junior that he and a pal of his are deeply chagrined by this sudden rain, having fixed for to-day an expedition in quest of Edelweiss, the captain has made an arrangement with that urchin to purchase from him his entire stock of the interesting flower, on whatever day he should make good his resolution. This magnificent offer, it need not be said, all but took away the breath of Auguier junior. It just now strikes the captain that he might negotiate with the two urchins to purchase from them their twofold stock, stipulating, of course, a corresponding reduction. He mentions the idea to Miss Peachum, who, with just the faintest light in her small eyes, advises him to collect, or depute Auguier junior to collect, *a number of boys* to strip the mountains far and near of the precious plant. When they have done so, they will, of course, stand no chance of finding a market for their supply, and will sell it to him for a mere song, considering the quantity.

"You think so?" The captain starts to his feet. "Why, that is an inspiration. Allow me to shake hands with you, Miss Peachum. You are a sensible woman. I could wish, upon my word, you were my sister."

"His sister?" Miss Peachum turns on him a withering gaze. "His sister?" Is it for this that she has confided to him that she is heiress to an uncle; for this that she has curled and crimped her hair; for this that she has revived the days of gushing seventeen with *his* odious sister? Does he, can he, think that she would tolerate him as a brother? No! Glowering at his outstretched hand, the little lady with the long waist rises and leaves the room.

This somewhat unpleasant *tête-à-tête* has passed un-

noticed, thanks to the steady flow of sound beneath the fingers of Miss Luscombe-Binns, who has been performing unsolicited for the benefit of the company in general and of herself in particular for the last two hours.

There is hardly any one who has not some pet aversion. Goethe, who more than any man took life easily, was upset by the barking of dogs; and Schopenhauer, who more than any man took life heavily found the cracking of whips especially unendurable. To descend from the realm of genius to that occupied by lesser mortals, we all of us know of cases of pet aversions among our friends. *One* shudders at the mention of rice-pudding; another thinks life would be bearable were there no such things as organ-men; a third finds it impossible to be commonly civil to persons with red hair; and a fourth almost loses reason on being obliged to pay on a letter over-weight. The knowledge of such cases as these emboldens me to confess that among a fair number of pet aversions I have one rather strongly marked, and that is a hatred of so-called Music which is the result of belabouring, with the united force of fingers, elbows, shoulder-blades, backbone, and feet, an instrument which, if once a pianoforte, has no longer any claim to that name. Such was the case with the instrument at the Edelweiss, a creaking, crumbling wreck, not without a certain pathos attached to it, had nobody touched its time-stained ivory; as nobody should have done, now that it would no more be touched by the maidens that looked so dreamy and the youths that looked so sheepish in the pictures above it—youths and maidens that sat for their portraits twenty years ago, when the old piano like them was young. At present Miss Luscombe-Binns sits at it. This young person has what in England we call “*a talent*” for music,

and is playing an arabesque of Schumann's, which she plays like an exercise. Three voices which must be kept apart; here notes at which fingers must be lifted; here notes at which they must be held down—that is what the master's work represents to her. As to curiously carved figures, as to lines interlaced, as to curves and angles all twisted and twirled—she would stare if you asked her to bring out that. As she comes to the end of her piece for the twentieth time, Madame la Mie, who has been well-nigh maddened by this persistent playing, asks her, looking up from her book—

“Have you ever read Victor Hugo's definition of music, Miss Luscombe-Binns?”

“Why, no; I don't fancy I have,” replies Miss Ottilie. Having never read a line by Victor Hugo in her life, she need not have thus qualified the statement. Madame la Mie says nothing, but, having folded her arms, falls to contemplating the coat-sleeves of the dear defunct; just now looking, to say the truth, a little shabby about the cuffs.

Miss Luscombe-Binns, who has not yet made up her mind what to think of the mother of Monsieur la Mie, but has quite made up her mind what to think of the latter, anxious to preserve the best of relationships, says, with her pleasantest smile—

“You've made me quite curious. What *does* Victor Hugo say?”

“Victor Hugo”—the lady in the coat looks up—
“Victor Hugo defines music, mademoiselle, as ‘that which one cannot put into words, *and cannot keep to one's self.*’”

“Indeed!” Miss Luscombe-Binns is about to add, “What a fine definition!” when she becomes aware that

an ill-suppressed titter is going the round of the room. She looks at madame, who, with her arms still crossed, inscrutable as an Egyptian statue, gazes into space. Feeling vaguely that to cope with her were dangerous, she rises, shuts the piano, and, soon after, shuts the door, having decided to betake herself to the solitude of her own room, there to reflect how sharper than a serpent's tooth is the wit of certain ladies.

It was not to be imagined that such members of the family Luscombe-Binns as were present at this sally of Madame la Mie's should join in the titter aroused thereby. However keen be a lady's sense of humour, she is seldom tickled by a piece of wit at the expense of her own daughter. Mrs. Luscombe-Binns, whose habitual expression was not of the most pleasing, looked upon this occasion as though indeed affected with nameless sickness and disgust; and not she alone. Heartily as a young man may, in a general way, enjoy a laugh—and Juan Luscombe-Binns, when not courting melancholy, was rather given to the lamentable practice of giggling—if he have in him any fibre at all, he seldom appreciates the exercise of comic power to the discomfiture of his own sister. Juan, as far as in him lay, imitated the maternal expression, screwing up his very small mouth till it looked preternaturally tiny, and fixing on the company with a steady, solemn gaze his very large eyes till they looked preternaturally big. All this was not to be expected otherwise, and it was to be anticipated that the paternal Binns would do as did his wife, as did his son. On the other hand, it is not unheard of that things expected have not come to pass; whereas things which have not been anticipated have taken place. This latter phenomenon met with illustration in the case of

Mr. Binns the elder. Preserve us from amnesia! Dreadful must it be to know one's self a victim to a malady making one unable to say that which one means; and past expression dismal to contract in consequence, as did John Binns, a habit of saying that which one does not mean, or should not mean. Just as Mrs. Luscombe-Binns was glowering her direst at Madame la Mie, as Juan was looking his darkest in the same direction, and as in face of these two phenomena a lull was following on the universal if muffled titter, that misguided being, John Binns, fell first to smiling, then to laughing with short convulsive catches of breath, and finally, fairly shaking with merriment, said, addressing the remark to (of all beings in the world) *his wife*—

“Haven't heard anything as good as that for a long time, my dear; what say?”

Did we not live in an age that delights in the harrowing, I would here insert a blank space, leaving to the reader to imagine—or not to imagine, as might seem best to himself—the effect produced by this ill-timed ebullition of mirth. As it is, I feel no compunction in describing it. First of all, Juan Luscombe-Binns's small mouth unscrewed itself, and, bursting into a laugh, that youth staggered and all but fell. Mrs. Luscombe-Binns sat as though petrified, looking neither to right nor left, but at one spot in empty air, than which nothing perhaps lends a more uncanny expression to the face. The rest of the company, could they have been subjected to instantaneous photography, might have been exhibited as so many monuments to amazement in its various forms of wonderment pure, amusement, fear, and horror; John Binns (this one of the few wise acts which have ever been known to proceed from him) making use of this

feeling while at its height, with incredible presence of mind, to escape, the door suddenly closing on him as it had closed on his daughter. It has been said that, despite what his heart must have told him of petticoat-wrath to come after this unaccountable proceeding of his, he was heard some minutes later chuckling in the passage; but this to me smacks of the stage, and I decline to believe it.

All this time there has been made no special mention of Madame Roland. There has also been made no special mention of the stucco figure in one corner of the room, and if the latter fact is now brought forward, it is because it throws light on the former. Scant courtesy though it may seem to compare one of the greatest of the great ladies in Geneva (great no less in a social than in a corporeal sense) to a lady in stucco—excepting, indeed, that the latter wore a chronic radiant smile, and extended a basket of fruit which no one ever deigned to accept—there was little difference between her and Madame Roland, who sat passive and mute by the hour with what Madame Morel called “the indefinable something of the rich lady.” Just now, at about three paces from her, stands her daughter with her affianced, the young couple looking about as happy as might look a very pretty, very sharp-clawed kitten, and a specially ill-favoured, specially snarling puppy, who, in defiance of the rule concerning the sympathy between tribe feline and canine, have resolved, not without some pangs of fear, to link their fortunes for better or worse. As Monsieur Beauregard contemplates Eugénie Roland, it strikes him as forcibly as ever that she is very lovely; but it also strikes him—and this, perhaps, just now more forcibly than hitherto—that her beauty is strangely

cruel. Her teeth have not escaped him, nor the smile that straightens her lips, nor the look that comes into her eyes, nor the coldness of her hand. All this he has noticed before. Yet, as though he had never done so, looking at her now, his face changes.

"Thank you," says the girl, returning his gaze with interest.

"For what?"

"For unintentional frankness.—*Ciel!* how ugly you are, Bernard!" This she says, scanning him as he had scanned her.

He bows. "Thank *you*."

"For what?"

"For frankness not unintentional, *chère petite chatte*;" and he lifts her hand to his lips.

A dialogue strangely different is taking place between Margaret Winkelried and her betrothed.

"Did you say he *carried* you into the house?" says Franz, as he contemplates the girl, leaning against a window-sash.

"Yes; you'll admit that he must have strength."

"Pooh!"

He will admit nothing of the kind. Did he care to reflect on the matter, he could not deny that to lift up and carry, if only some paces, a girl of Margaret's height, and moreover insensible, bore testimony to very unusual strength. But he does not care to reflect. Young men in love have a fancy for telling themselves that certain maidens are, more or less, creatures of air; and had Franz Bürger been told that Monsieur la Mie, instead of carrying this tall girl Margaret some paces, had carried her all the way from Bex to Les Plans, in his present interesting, but rather illogical phase of mind, his first

emotion would have been one of envy at what must have been the unparalleled rapture experienced by the Professor, and not till some time had passed would it slowly have dawned on him how great must have been the strain on that gentleman's muscular system.

"He has been altogether so very kind to me, Franz," continues Margaret, "I am longing to introduce you; and you must thank him nicely now, won't you? He's a little bit comical, you know, and very vain; but then, so many men are. What are you smiling at? His heart is as good as gold, and—well, I want you to like him, Franz."

This large-hearted Margaret makes two of the greatest blunders a girl can make. First of all, she expects her lover to see "kindness" in another man's waiting on her, his beautiful betrothed; secondly, she expects him to thank that man "nicely," *i.e.* prettily, gracefully—as if a man ever did anything "prettily," "gracefully," in connection with another man, more especially another by fate decreed to be the temporary usurper of some of his sweetest privileges.

Franz smiles grimly, and for a moment feels that it will not be altogether unpleasant sending a ball through this very "kind" gentleman; then he says, with a short laugh—

"Could we not, for the sake of variety, dear, talk of somebody else beside the Professor?"

The girl looks slightly amazed; their conversation on "the Professor" having been almost limited to the above remarks, and the subject having been introduced by Franz himself. Then she says, good-humouredly—

"Logical man! Supposing I break to you, while we are on the subject of gentlemen, what my spraining my

ankle necessitated striking up an acquaintanceship with—a doctor.”

“*Grosser Himmel!*—Another!—How many men is that you have told me of now?”

“The Professor, one, and the Doctor, one—makes two,” says Margaret sententiously, doing the sum on her fingers to be sure of its accuracy. “I believe that is all. Men are in a minority here.”

“*Gott sei Dank!*” The language of Franz is, German-like, characterized by some excess of fervour. “If there’s one thing in all the world I detest, it is to see a woman given no peace from——”

“Don’t you want to know what the doctor is like?” Margaret breaks in on this rather tempestuous speech. “I do wish you could see that nice, sleek, little smooth-tongued——”

“You angel! I should horribly like to kiss you, excepting that it would scandalize the English folks here,” exclaims Franz, similarly cutting short a speech which promised to be of some length, while his whole face lighted up in the most unchristian way at this description of a fellow-man.

“And why are we here?” replies Margaret, without a blush. “We might just as well go out on the balcony.”

“You do not mind the damp air?”

It is doubtful whether a German, be he ever so much in love, ever forgets that exposure to atmospheric moisture is injurious to the system. Margaret nodding a negative, Franz none the less insists on the production of scarves and hats, and only with these superadded to the ardent desire to exchange a kiss—or two, or three—out on to the balcony they pass.

We might, of course, follow them thither; but since,

as the reader knows, the motive prompting them to take the venturesome step was to spare the feelings of "English" folk, let us show our appreciation of the deference shown to us.

Just as the doors leading into the balcony close on Franz and Margaret, Miss Die Peachum carries out a happy idea. This juvenile, the leading idiosyncracies of whom have been described some chapters back, has been sitting for some half-hour past in a corner of the room, arguing with the little Luscombe-Binnses some weighty matter, which at an early stage of its discussion had resolved itself into the words, "You daren't," "I dare." We have most of us, I suppose, pleasing reminiscences of days in our youth spent, the greater part of them, in bandying some such phrase as this, begun in a whisper and ended in a shout, or begun in a shout and ended in a whisper, as the case may have been. It is in face of such recollections that one has sometimes vague doubts as to the total adorableness of humanity young. Miss Peachum, the Cherub, and Margery, having begun their discussion in a high key, and been promptly silenced by "Aunt Mildred," had relapsed into whispers. Having interchanged verbal bombs in this tone for some time, Miss Die, with a sudden impulse, and a last "I dare!" crossed the room to her mother. That lady is reading a novel, and is so engrossed in it as to be sightless and deaf to the rest of the world. Unhappy she! Die asks her in her most insinuating manner, and with that artlessness of expression which commonly heralds some specially glaring piece of youthful villany—

"Marmy, may I dress up?"

"Yes, yes."

"And—take your bonnet?" This with slight hesita-

tion caused by the recollection of a "spanking" on a former occasion when this had been done.

"Yes, yes."

"And umbrella?"

"No; well, there, yes," as the sweet little damsel showed premonitory symptoms of tears, in sudden tightening of lips and the planting in one eye of a small black fist.

"Anything, everything, only leave me in peace!"

Exit Die with edifying haste; followed, at discreet intervals, by the Cherub and Margery.

"You seem to be enjoying your book," says a voice at Mrs. Peachum's side.

No answer.

The voice belongs to Mademoiselle Roland. Mrs. Peachum is breathlessly following the fortunes of some Romeo and Juliet.

"I shall say it again," says mademoiselle; and she says, in a still louder key, "You seem to be enjoying *your book*, Mrs. Peachum."

No answer. Mrs. Peachum reads on. The strain on her patience is too great. She looks at the last page, and then, laying down the book, leans back in her chair.

"H'm! don't think much of *that*! Ah! were you speaking to me?" This to mademoiselle, who replies in that low sustained tone which says—"All present, listen."

"Well, yes; I was saying you seemed to be enjoying your book, but you don't think much of it, you say."

Mrs. Peachum's attitude to fiction had become a standing joke at the boarding-house. Perhaps it strikes her that Mademoiselle Roland's manner has something of banter in it; indeed, banter is a mild name to give to the undertone in that young woman's voice. Throwing

from her the book which was to be the cause of bringing upon her condign punishment for persistent ingratitude shown to novelists, whose works she never laid out of her hands, after rapt perusal, without the brief but pithy comment, "H'm! don't think much of *that!*" she gave the young Frenchwoman a Roland for her Oliver in a tone which was meant to be suggestive of the regions of everlasting snow, but which perhaps rather called to mind ideas of Vesuvius on the verge of eruption; the gist of what she said being that mademoiselle, like all of her country, was really so dazzlingly witty, one could only marvel that creatures brought into contact with her should catch no dim reflection of her brilliancy. This, be it repeated, was the *gist*; it would be misleading the public to say that Mrs. Peachum's speech as she delivered it was as fluent as the above. She did certainly utter the words "dazzlingly," "marvel," "dim reflection," and "brilliancy," but the others added above she either omitted or uttered so faintly that they were inaudible, the result being, that though her retort was eminently effective, it did undeniably lack some coherency. Such as it was, she herself was satisfied with it, and was leaning back with that smile which comes over the face of the civilized human subject the wide world over, as often as he or she feels that he or she has said something uncivil civilly, when the door opened, and, in the language of drama,—
"Enter Die."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DIE "DRESSED UP."

PERHAPS the course of human life is nowhere set forth with more truth and pithiness than in the admirable opening couplet to the simple stanzas immortalizing the fate of Humpty Dumpty. It seems peculiarly like what has been human experience in all times that just at the moment in which, metaphorically speaking, Mrs. Peachum "sat on a wall," throning over the temporarily crushed Eugénie—that, just at this moment, fate should see fit to prepare for her "a great fall;"—in other words, that while the look, mentioned above, still lit up her face, the door should open and admit Die.

There can be no doubt that a good deal of evil has been brought about in the world by novelists. It is all very well to say, with the author of "Wahrheit und Dichtung," "Where is the harm in a pretty girl or a handsome young man's putting herself or himself into the place of similar beings by whom fate has dealt more kindly or roughly than by them?" the grim truth remains, that no end of harm has been brought about by writers of fiction. Had he or she of whose work Mrs. Peachum had declared, making use of her stock phrase, "She didn't think much of *that*," not known how for hours past to engross that lady's attention to a degree making her indifferent to all things sublunar, she would never have had so little thought of the morrow as to say to Miss Die those rash and petulant words, "Yes, yes, take anything, everything!"—a

carte blanche of which that small person, in the style peculiar to youth, had availed herself to the fullest.

The details of which consisted Die's dress-up were as follows:—to the “natural rosebud of health” on her cheeks she had added plentifully artificial roses, these gaining startling relief from the application of powder with no sparing touch to forehead, nose, and chin. Her eyebrows likewise bore testimony to doctoring. So much for her face. A bonnet of “Aunt Milly's” had been fixed upon as more becoming than mother's; for the rest, the small lady was dressed in maternal gear, a large dress-improver, which in the haste had been fastened much to one side, being the most conspicuous feature. She walked in, holding her dress up high in front, while it trailed behind. She was not unescorted. It had been agreed that the Cherub was to open the door, but that noble specimen of youthful manhood had decamped at the last minute, leaving the ladies (his sister and Die) to face the grown-ups alone. Margery had therefore opened the door, and stood on the threshold with a look in which were curiously blended terror, admiration, and curiosity. She held, moreover, raised in one little pink hand the corner of a small pinafore, having, with fine foresight, calculated that with weeping and gnashing of teeth this business must end. It was, indeed, this calculation on the part of both children that made it apparent to all present that in this dressing-up had been intended a direct exposure of the ways and means employed by “Marmy” and Aunt Milly to impart to themselves an air of juvenility. While Margery gazed spell-bound at Die, that young person advanced steadily towards her mother and aunt, in front of whom she turned round to the door with, “*Didn't* I dare now?”

After which, as though only now the enormity of her act flashed on her, she threw herself on the floor in her favourite attitude, and, stretching straight before her her two legs, visible up to the knees beneath the skirt which she had all the time held up high in front, opened her mouth to its widest, and—did not scream.

The reason of this was, that at said minute there appeared in the doorway behind Margery, Monsieur la Mie. That gentleman had just finished his toilet, and, completely unconscious of the upsetting complications taking place in the parlour, made his entry into this room with that smile of his, of which every lady at the Edelweiss acknowledged in her heart, if she did not acknowledge aloud, that, like his salute, it was a poem, a dream, a thing to bring tears to the eyes.

Well at this moment might Die stop short in what was meant to have been a scream the like of which has probably never yet been heard. Not she alone collapsed. The faces of all present, which, excepting those of the Peachums, had just before worn but one expression, and that portraying the keenest amusement, now lengthened preternaturally. As for Margery, she still remained on the threshold. Would I could say that her friendship stood this test, that to the last she sustained Die, but I cannot. Partial as I am to the Cherub's sister, who, compared with him, was assuredly made of glorious stuff, truth compels me to say that at this juncture she placed one small soft hand in the hand of Monsieur la Mie, and, raising to his a curiously puckered face, said, stumbling over the *th*, as usual when in excitement—

“We'll go away togeffer.”

And “togeffer” they went away, Monsieur la Mie at a pace rather more leisurely than that at which he had

come, and with some abatement of the killing smile; Margery with brisk little steps, three to his one, and considerable abatement of the look of terror which had before marked her face. I am ashamed to have to admit that as the distance increased between Margery and the sitting-room, her heart grew lighter and lighter; and that, finally, utterly oblivious to the hapless Die, left to face retribution alone, within face of the Professor's room, with her little hand still in his, she was moved to give to the latter a gentle pressure, accompanying this blandishment with a smile which no gentleman, whatever his age, could have withstood, as she said, following up the line of conduct proposed in her first speech—

“You and I’ll *keep* togeffer.”

And “togeffer” they kept.

Meanwhile, what of poor Die?

I have been assured, and I like to believe it, that Die on this occasion escaped a “spanking,” it being agreed by her mother and aunt that to deal with her “seriously,” would only bring down further ridicule on themselves. I have also been told, and like to believe, that Margery escaped scot-free, the Professor having declared that only on this condition would he give her up—which seems to prove the potency of ladies’ smiles and wiles, though ladies be but five years old. The thing, however, that I have heard, and most like to believe, that it would give me boundless regret could I have a shade of a doubt of it, is, that Margery and Die, meeting the Cherub next day in a secluded part of the garden, did combine to abuse and belabour him, did beat him and pinch him and scratch him, did all but annihilate him, in word and deed, with a zeal which was worthy of the cause.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A LADY WITH A SHARP VOICE.—MARIE MINARD UNHAPPY.—
MISS SCOLLOP COMPROMISED.

It was the night of this day made memorable by Madame Roland's whist-party; by the mischief in the hive in the absence of Madame Morel; by the arrival at Les Plans of Franz Bürger and Monsieur Beauregard; by the several passages-at-arms between Monsieur la Mie and these gentlemen; by a variety of skirmishes fought in the Edelweiss sitting-room; by a tender episode between Margaret and her lover; and, finally, by the crowning misconduct of Die. It was not to be supposed that the night of such a day would be like unto the nights of other days; nor was it so.

To begin with the Rose des Alpes. Here, at half-past ten precisely, Madame Morel, as was her custom, wound up her watch and held it to her ear. As this was an accepted signal, one of the young women rose and lighted a candle. Having done so, she blew it and the match out together, all from excess of haste. Finally, she placed the candlestick in the hand of her chief, who took it, saying to her thirteen subordinates, who with one accord had risen—

"I wish you good night. *I*, ladies, mean to go to bed."

A hum of "Good night," "Good night," was the only reply. None of the thirteen ladies evinced the slightest surprise at the italicized pronoun. It was Madame Morel's habit to take her departure every night, solemnly an-

nouncing the fact that *she* meant to go to bed. This she did with an emphasis implying her suspicion that the rest of the world, but especially the thirteen individuals composing her teaching staff, habitually went to walk, or did anything at night but go to bed. No sooner had she passed through the door, which one of her subordinates had held open, than the latter, all of them, lighted candles and repaired to rest. As the last was about to quit the room—she whom her colleagues called *Gendarme*, by reason of sundry qualities that would have made her an invaluable member of any country's police-force—Monsieur Louis Auguier entered, and, looking round with his subdued smile, that indescribable something between pensiveness and large complacency, drew a chair to the spot, where hung from the ceiling the one lamp that, previous to the lighting of candles, had illumined the room. It was the manifest intention of Monsieur Louis Auguier to ascend this chair, thereby giving to himself the necessary height to extinguish the lamp; but it was also the manifest intention of Monsieur Louis Auguier to wait till "*ces dames*" should be out of sight to do this. Not so reflected *Gendarme*. Seeing the little man drag a chair beneath the lamp, she strode back, and with her big benevolent smile, said, "I can do that for you without a chair," which saying she raised her hand and with ease turned out the light. I believe the look which by her candle she saw next minute on the face of Monsieur Louis Auguier, not to mention his icy "Thank you," was a lesson to *Gendarme*. Certain I am that she never again offered her aid to him unsolicited; and when the nondescript young woman, who had witnessed the scene, said with some approach to bad taste:—"So like you, that, *Gendarme*. How do you feel now?"—she of the massive

frame, of the stride and deep bass voice, the lady policeman, replied, "Snubbed, my friend; totally, irrecoverably snubbed. The frigidity of that look, that tone, I shall never forget."

"Right so, *Gendarme*; let it be a warning to you. You are always parading your height."

"Now, that is mean," said the tall lady, and she spoke the truth.

The nondescript young woman was small; but though this was the case, and though her big colleague might have on various occasions given her cause to feel it, the moment was ill-timed for recrimination. She felt so herself a minute later, and crept to bed dejectedly. Dejectedly to bed crept also *Gendarme*.

Dejection for divers reasons reigned supreme in the house, and such as were not asleep within sixty minutes of this dialogue's taking place, fell one and all a prey to melancholy. This was peculiarly the case with Marie Minard. In fact, that young woman succumbed so totally to despondency that she came to the semi-insane resolution to take a walk round the covered balcony skirting the house, as the one means of calming her perturbed spirits. This would seem to have been a natural proceeding enough had the moon been shining brightly; but the moon was not shining brightly,—it was not shining at all; neither was a star twinkling, nor was there summer lightning—in fact, there was absolutely nothing to entice one into the open. The sky was pitch dark, and the rain was descending with unabated energy. It was a night in which no one in his senses would be supposed to venture forth; and Marie Minard, as has been said, was suffering from temporary aberration. Holding

her dressing-gown tight about her, she leant against a prop of the balcony and gave herself up to meditation.

“*Ciel!*”

An arm was laid on hers. It was not a gentleman's, but that of Mademoiselle Robert, a colleague of hers, known to the reader as the owner of a sharp voice—a lady who had been in educational harness for the better part of a life merging now into the sixth decade; a lady of very keen intellect, of language to match, and a heart that was soft to foolishness.

“Look here,” she says in a whisper, meant to be irate, “I'm not going to see this going on any longer, Marie Minard; so you need not think I am.”

“I am unhappy,” is the answer from the strong-minded young person, who wears her hair short, and is “so horribly mannish.”

“And pray, why?” She of the sharp voice says this in her sharpest tones; and then waits, as though, forsooth, there were any likelihood of Marie Minard's accepting this invitation to be confidential. Then she continues, with rather unnecessary zeal, “You needn't answer me, my dear; I don't want to hear a word from you, for I shouldn't believe a syllable you uttered, and I know all you've got to tell me, as it is. You fancy we leave this place to-morrow. We don't; for I have arranged differently with madame. And you've been playing fast and loose with Monsieur la Mie, and just now discover that you are in love with him. So you are; and that, let me tell you, is a thing I discovered long ago. And you are trying to force yourself not to see that our friend is in love with you, which he is; and which, let me tell you, I also discovered long ago. And—what! you fancy you're going to keep me standing

here half the night, Marie Minard? In that you're mistaken; and equally so if you think I'm going to see you stand here half the night. So now get back to bed. Unhappy! Pooh! You don't know what unhappiness is, and never shall, if I can help it. You've only to put out your hand for happiness. Now, don't you go stealing your arm round me, and—what are you kissing me for, eh? Heart alive, this rain!" And she of the sharp voice passes her hand across her eyes, the rain having somehow got into them.

Then she marches Marie Minard back to bed, and having scornfully promised to go back to bed herself, walks the length of the balcony, once, twice, thinking—Heaven knows what. Whole five decades of life, and three of them spent in teaching—small teaching at a low salary; a worn, unlovely woman, with hair turning grey, with a tired look in her eyes and a hard look about her mouth, with a sharp voice and—all this patent to all the world; whilst hidden away where on all God's earth no soul can see it, is that big, soft heart.

What is she thinking of, and why is she weeping, for surely, surely she is weeping? Heaven knows. Perhaps she once was young. I like to fancy that every one once was young. Perhaps she once had hopes of happiness. Who but would wish to fancy that every one once had these?

"How dark it is, and how the rain plashes!" she mutters, as she returns to her room through the window.

* * * * *

"Robbers!"

So saying, Miss Scollop jumps from her bed, puts on over her night-gown a flannel petticoat, truth to say, rather short, and, throwing a shawl about her shoulders,

makes straight for the bed-chamber of Madame Auguier, opening the door of which, she gasps an intimation to the effect that burglars are ransacking the house.

"Sh!"

Miss Scollop paused. Should she return to her own room, and bolt window and door? No! Contemptible thought! If there were danger to face, she would help face it.

"Throw something about you quickly!" This she said softly, in rather peculiar but perfectly comprehensible French. "I will go with you. All I want you to do is to try the door at the end of the passage. We need not rouse the house."

"Sh!" a second time came the guarded and somewhat ungracious reply, this time near to Miss Scollop.

Next minute she is gently pushed into the passage, and she and mine hostess proceed on tiptoe along the passage. It is pitch dark. Miss Scollop gropes along, feeling her way with outstretched hand. Suddenly—heavens above!—her fingers came in contact with a bristling substance—*hair, short hair*. In a moment the truth flashes upon her. She has mistaken the room of Monsieur Louis Auguier for that of his mother; has been groping all this time by his side, not by that of his mother; and this in a short red petticoat over a night-gown, and with only a tiny shawl about her shoulders.

All the world has heard of hair turning white in a single night; of "beads" of cold perspiration; of gasps, of groans, of swoons and screams; of weird silence and maniacal laughter, as incidental to situations of the gruesome type, and surely none could be more so than that of this scrupulous Englishwoman, when she suddenly found herself, in the scantest of scant apparel, alone at

the midnight hour with that "*genteel*, always *genteel*" gentleman, Monsieur Louis Auguier. According to her own account, she all but lost her reason. The strong-minded may argue, and no doubt will, that the night was pitch dark, and that human beings, commonly speaking, do not see through dense gloom; but the more sensitive and refined will rightly deem with Miss Scollop, that not even the consciousness of the densest shadows enveloping her can afford complete solace to a spinster of strict views on propriety who, in a brief flannel petticoat, knows herself to be at a distance of two feet from a gentleman.

Rushing past Monsieur Louis Auguier, Miss Scollop with wild haste tried the door. It was locked and bolted. "Go back to your room now, monsieur," she said sternly.

"Certainly, mademoiselle. Good night." Poor Monsieur Louis Auguier! there was a tone of mingled pain and reproach in his small, flat voice.

CHAPTER L.

MEETING AT NIGHT BETWEEN MONSIEUR LA MIE AND FRANZ BÜRGER.—"VERY GOOD," SAYS A WOMAN'S VOICE.—MARGARET AND AUGUIER JUNIOR TAKE A MORNING WALK.

WHILE the events recorded above were taking place at the Rose des Alpes, two gentlemen were taking a midnight stroll round the Edelweiss, each in the deliberate expectation of meeting the other. This had not been the case with the ladies. Marie Minard, on reflect-

ing that a breath of night air might bring calm to her feelings, had sallied forth, convinced that on such a night not a soul would be abroad, and great had been her consternation when Mademoiselle Robert appeared on the scene. Now when Monsieur la Mie set out to walk shortly after midnight, it was with the firm conviction that he had been anticipated by Franz Bürger. And so he had.

"I wish to ask you to allow me to postpone the duel, Herr Bürger," he said to that gentleman, quietly.

Herr Bürger as quietly replied that it gave him infinite regret not to be able to do so. The duel had been arranged to take place on the next day but one, and on that day it must take place. He gave no reason for this seeming stubbornness, and Monsieur la Mie resolved to press the point.

"It is not that I regret the challenge, or wish to postpone the affair indefinitely, but—the fact is, you happen to be the wrong man."

Again Herr Bürger coldly expressed regret, adding that he was at a loss to see why, whether right man or wrong, a duel having been arranged with him, that duel should not take place. He also remarked, satirically, that he was not aware of having changed his identity since first meeting the Professor. He——

"*Doucement, doucement, monsieur!*" interrupted Monsieur la Mie, somewhat taken aback to find the German on these heights of jealousy; for that jealousy was beneath this bitterness he quickly divined. "You really do me too great an honour in deeming me to have stood at all in your way. The lady who has plighted her troth to you has never touched my heart—for a very good reason;

and—for a very good reason—I cannot flatter myself to have ever touched hers.”

“What! you too are engaged?” exclaimed Franz Bürger.

“Morally speaking, yes,” replied the Professor, with a dignity which was beautiful. “In point of fact——” A sigh completed this fragment.

“In point of fact, you are in love. I see it all plainly now. And you have mistaken me for somebody who stands between you and somebody; and, having picked a quarrel with me, the wrong man, you want now to pick a quarrel with the right one, and disable him, if possible, before, as is possible, I disable you.”

“Precisely,” replied the Professor.

The German’s perspicuity was marvellous.

Then the two gentlemen walked the length of the verandah again, this time in silence, until Herr Bürger feelingly remarked that, having turned over the Professor’s case in his mind, he could not decide to rob him of the pleasure of calling out his true rival first, but that *then*——

“Of course, of course!” Monsieur la Mie assured the magnanimous son of the fatherland that nothing in the wide world could be further from his thoughts than a desire “then” to shirk that other call of honour.

“As regards the day and hour,”—Franz Bürger was anxious, German like, to redeem by method any madness that might be attached to the proceeding, “supposing we say, duel the second *one hour after* duel the first.”

“Good!” said Monsieur la Mie.

“Very good!” said a woman’s voice.

Both gentlemen started. Before they had time to recover themselves, a shutter was thrown open, and Margaret Winkelried, fully dressed, stood in the lighted window.

"Duel the first is to be between you and some one, as yet unknown, Monsieur la Mie; duel the second between you and Franz Bürger. The *second*, mind. Is that agreed?"

Both gentlemen nodded.

"Nay; I want a more reliable answer. Promise it; swear it; give me your hands on it, both of you;" and she put both her hands through the opened window. "Thank you." In another instant the shutter was closed. "Good night."

"Give a woman only a respite," said Franz, as, laughing, he turned away.

None the less had the sudden, unexpected sight of the girl upset both him and Monsieur la Mie. Having parted, they both stayed up for hours, the one pacing his room, thinking; the other at his desk, reading. Margaret too stayed up, but she neither read nor walked about. She bent her head on her hands and thought. She was a woman, and had been given a respite. How could she best make use of it? Having thought for five minutes, she started to her feet, undressed, and, wiser than certain gentlemen, betook herself to bed. Having slept for five hours, she rose softly, dressed softly, and softly left the house.

At the garden gate she looked about her. She was bathed in sunlight, for, positively, it had stopped raining, and there was not a cloud as far as eye could see on the broad sky.

"Morning, mamselle!" said a clear child's voice.

"Good morning," replies Margaret. "Shall I go a bit of your way with you, *mon brave*?"

"Don't mind if you do," is the cool reply.

Margaret smiles. "And what of the new visitors?"

There has been quite a rush of gentlemen, hasn't there?"

"Two"—laconically.

"Two gentlemen staying with *you*?"

"Not they. Went to the Edelweiss, both of them. As if you and Mamselle Roland didn't know that!"

Again a smile from Margaret. "You are speaking of Herr Bürger and Monsieur Beauregard."

"Who else should I speak of? Phoo!"—throwing away a blade of grass, which he has been biting viciously. "I'll tell you something, mamselle; no, I won't."

"Then don't!"

Had she said "Please, do!" he would have kept his intention. As it was, he looked up at her.

"Well, there, I will. It's only this. The ladies over at our place are all as dull as—as——"

"Never mind a comparison. What of that?"

"Why, mother says it's because the gentlemen all go to you to the Edelweiss. And—— Look here, you won't tell, will you?"

"*Parole d'honneur.*"

"Well, one of them, the one with the funny ways, dressed up like a gentleman, and made believe to pay court, just for the joke—acting, you know; and the old lady found it out, and—— What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I only just notice how wet the grass is. I am simply wading. *Oh, mon brave!*"

"Mon brave" looked down. "Do you call them, *boots*?" he said scornfully, catching sight of the girl's cloth foot-gear. "You'd best get back as quick as you can. I'm off here;" and he pointed down a byroad; then, slashing the keen morning air with an improvised whip, departed, whistling.

Margaret paused for a moment. She would have liked to run after him and kiss him on his sunny eyes.

"Didn't I know I should meet you?" she soliloquized; "and didn't I know you would help to set matters right? To think what a march I have stolen on the others! A pretty comedy!" And catching up her dress, enchanted at the newest revelations, Fräulein Winkelried made straightway at full speed for the Rose des Alpes.

CHAPTER LI.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR SECOND DUEL.—TELEGRAMS.

It needed no small exertion on the part of Margaret before "the one with the funny ways" at the Rose des Alpes, the lady who had unconsciously brought upon herself the wrath of Monsieur la Mie, could be prevailed upon to "meet" that gentleman. Only when it had been explained to her that the shedding of blood might thereby be avoided, and some fellow-beings' peace of mind be established; only when Margaret had put the proposition, unconventional as it was, from a humorous *and* pathetic point of view, adding the declaration that leave the Rose des Alpes she would not until her request was granted;—then only did *Gendarme* relax; for it was she who had had that unhappy inspiration to dress up in masculine garb, and, thus apparelled, play cavalier to Marie Minard, little dreaming of the entanglements to which this disguise was to lead.

"And pray, who can be my second?" she asked suddenly. "Captain Macnab? Well, yes; I dare say he

would do me that service. I should like to know who will be the Professor's second. There is not a large number of men from whom to select. True, there is Luscombe-Binns, *père*———”

“He would forget on which side he was at the critical moment,” said Margaret, laughing.

“And Luscombe-Binns, *fils*; he of the full blue eye———”

“He would wing his way from Les Plans at the mere mention of pistols.”

“H'm! the Cherub would hardly suit.”

“Well, no, *hardly*,” said Margaret, laughing again. “No doubt the Professor has some one already in view. He has been making arrangements for another duel.”

This fact was announced as calmly as though the circumstance of a gentleman's having at one and the same time more than one duel on hand were of common occurrence.

“Do you know, young person, that you strike me as truly comical?” said *Gendarme*, with a burst of confidence.

Instead of replying as she might have done, that *Gendarme* had long since struck her as past expression ludicrous, the German gaily extended her hand.

“You'll meet the Professor, then? That is agreed. Have I your promise?”

“My faithfullest;” and *Gendarme* laid one hand dramatically on her heart, while the other she placed in that of Margaret.

* * * * *

All that day messengers were passing between the Rose des Alpes and the Edelweiss. Monsieur la Mie *had*, be it said, made arrangements regarding a second. On the day before, as the reader may remember, he had in-

formed Franz Bürger, on leaving him, that he meant to take a stroll, mentioning incidentally that he had business at the post-office. This business had been the despatch of a telegram to a youth in Geneva—a youth who had expressed his readiness to oblige the Professor in any emergency, the greater the better, and whose name, as no one will hear with surprise, was Ned Piggott; a young man who has been mentioned before in these pages as in love with the sister of Monsieur la Mie. When the latter had broken to Ned that his suit would never find favour with Madame la Mie; that, in fact, that lady's chief consolation for having permitted her daughter to leave Geneva temporarily was the thought that this change of scene might blot out an affection rather quickly conceived, resolved, as she was, that her daughter's husband should be no Englishman, but countryman of her own, whom she ("madame") might keep in surveillance;—when Monsieur la Mie had broken all this to Ned, the latter had quietly replied, with that look in his eyes which had made the Professor feel more than once that his love had changed this boy to a man, "You don't mind my hoping, I suppose; and I do hope still, and—and——"

He had said a good deal more; so much and so earnestly, that the Professor with confidence had had recourse to him on leaving Franz Bürger. "*Can you come to Les Plans?*" he telegraphed to him. "*Wire reply.—La Mie.*"

Instead of one message arriving some hour later, there had arrived two, worded, with one small difference, exactly alike:

"*Expect me to-morrow.—Piggott.*"

"*Expect me to-morrow.—Nicolette.*"

This kind of thing happens constantly in books, but

it takes place so exceedingly seldom in real life, that the reader will feel no astonishment on being told that Monsieur la Mie, with the two telegrams in his hand, asked himself—was he on his head or his feet? was he sane or demented? were mysteries *never* to end?—to all of which questions no answer was given, as, indeed, none was expected.

CHAPTER LII.

NICOLETTE ON HER WAY TO LES PLANS.—THE MEETING WITH
“MOTHER.”

WHEN Nicolette had arrived at 29 of the Rue de la Croix d'Or, it was to find, with considerable annoyance, that three letters addressed by her to Madame la Mie at that house had remained there, never having been forwarded to Les Plans. On her making inquiries, she was informed that madame had left no directions in the matter. Poor Nicolette! Considering that to her mother she had addressed herself exclusively since leaving home, this indeed showed gross indifference. The girl with difficulty kept back her tears, and, full of anger, made for the nearest post-office, from which she despatched to her brother the telegram which caused him such amazement. In another hour she was on board the steamer, whizzing along to Villeneuve. Crumpled in one hand, she held two letters, which she had ingeniously extracted from the letter-box by means of inserting a hair-pin. She meant to confront her mother with them, and, in default of other occupation, now opened them and read them. As it will greatly curtail matters if we read them

over her shoulder, I propose that we lay aside compunction so far as to do so.

Letter number one:

"DEAR MOTHER,

"I am very, very unhappy, and mean to return to Geneva. Margaret Winkelried has written that she is the same, and wants to come home; so that will make all right. Do write me a line.

"Your loving

"NICOLETTE."

Letter number two:

"DEAR MOTHER,

"I think you might answer me. Margaret Winkelried has quite decided to leave you, so there is no reason why I should be in the way. I am going back to Geneva at once. Perhaps I may earn a crust, and not be a burden to any one.

"Your unhappy

"NICOLETTE."

There was a fine touch of pathos in the "crust," which to Nicolette did not lose on the second reading. Having finished perusing both letters, she sat thinking of——

"What!"

She started to her feet. The very being of whom she was thinking stood before her.

"Is it possible, Mademoiselle la Mie, that you too are bound for Les Plans?"

Almost every one knows what a small tourists' steamer

is, and all that a small tourists' steamer is, it is to a superlative degree on a Swiss lake in the height of the season. Had there not been people on all sides of her—people of every age and nationality, crowded into the space of a moderate-sized sitting-room; people to Nicolette representing nothing but so many eyes and ears, bent on seeing and hearing everything that went on around them, it is possible, nay, it is probable, in her forlorn state, that she would have heartily welcomed the approach of Ned Piggott, and that in the course of some minutes he and she would have poured out their hearts to each other. But put any girl in her place. After an absence that had seemed an eternity, but which, now she came to think of it, only covered some weeks, she met her admirer for the first time again, of all places in the world, on board a crowded vessel. His advances had never been countenanced—nay, had met with downright disapprobation from her mother, to whom she was now about to return, having merely telegraphed this intention. "Is it possible that you too are bound for Les Plans?" he had said. What would her mother say when they arrived together? Of course, she would think it a preconcerted thing. And on every side of her there were faces, on every side of her ears and eyes, making it quite impossible for her to explain to the Englishman how peculiarly unfortunate it was that he should just now be on his way to Les Plans.

Ned Piggott watched the troubled face before him; then said gravely, "I hope nothing serious has happened. The telegram to me explained nothing."

"Telegram? Who telegraphed for you? My brother?"

"Yes." He sat down beside her. "And for you?"

At that moment everything reeled before Nicolette.

Opposite to her there was a German couple, eating sausage sandwiches, and drinking beer out of one mug. They called each other "angel," as lovers outside earthy England mostly do. Not far from them was a father hugging a specially unlovely miniature reproduction of himself, his face being moderately plain, that of the infant quite abnormally so. The other passengers consisted of a number of Genevese *bourgeois*, and a sprinkling of foreigners from all parts of the globe, but especially from those privileged parts thereof in which the language spoken is English.

All these good people swam before the eyes of Nicolette at the Englishman's question, "Who telegraphed for you?" The letter-box unopened, the long silence, all was explained in a moment. Telling herself that her mother must be ill, and might be—nay, she dared not even in thought frame that word—she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

Say what one will, there is a good deal of tact in the world. The highflown Germans busied themselves more than ever with the consumption of beer and sausage; the plain-looking father with the plainer babe feigned to be totally absorbed in contemplating the latter's blurred little face; while one exceptionally ingenious and kind-hearted being having suggested that a small speck in the distance might be Chillon, all the other passengers fell with commendable haste and good taste to focussing it with their telescopes, or, in the absence of these, with their hands held tube-fashion, this giving Nicolette time to recover her composure, which she soon did, and, looking up at the Englishman, said—

"Forgive me. It may be nothing dreadful, of course, but I wish we were at Les Plans."

And she left him, and went to the end of the deck, where she sat looking straight before her with big, still eyes. She had never had love lavished on her by this parent; they had hardly seemed to know each other, though Nicolette had often wished for the ice to be broken. With the thought that now rose to her mind, and that she dared not frame into words, she was seized with a passionate longing to see her mother. Would the journey never end?

It did end in time, as all things do. At Villeneuve her baggage was carried on shore by somebody who followed the girl like her shadow. She was put into a railway carriage by this same person, who then sat down opposite to her, saying never a word, but stealing furtive peeps at the pale, drawn face before him. At Bex she was helped to alight from the train, then lifted into a carriage bound for Les Plans. When in sight of the village, Nicolette for the first time grew restless. The horse went so slowly; she could walk quicker than that.

Somebody, still saying nothing, put one hand upon hers, and one on the carriage door.

"What is the name of the inn at which Monsieur la Mie is staying?" she asked, addressing the driver. She had not spoken for hours.

"Pension Edelweiss. That is it." He pointed it out with his whip.

In a minute the girl had forced the carriage door, and had leaped to the ground; in another she was in her mother's arms, in an agony of tears.

Ten minutes had passed. Madame la Mie was still soothing her daughter, as though she were a child, while ever and anon she drew the sleeve of the dear defunct across her own red eyes.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE DUEL.

THE mysterious gentleman who had roused the wrath of Monsieur la Mie declined to divulge his name till on the spot and at the hour appointed for the duel—the spot being two miles distant from Les Plans, the hour being six o'clock in the morning. He transacted everything through Captain Macnab, and was for pistols rather than swords; while Monsieur la Mie, who, in his turn, transacted everything through Mr. Piggott, declared himself indifferent as to the weapon employed, the thing of main importance to him being that it should be dangerous, life-taking, he might say.

This message, when conveyed to *Gendarme*, had the effect of making that lady all but succumb to terror; and here be it said that she, who piqued herself not a little on her deep voice and generally manly air, steadily refused, as did all her colleagues, to touch or even go near the pistol procured by Captain Macnab. Nay, when the morning arrived for the duel to take place, the party at the Rose des Alpes, to which establishment the captain had betaken himself at an early hour, not only insisted on seeing Monsieur la Mie and his second out of sight before they arranged themselves in the order of going, but when they *did* finally start, it was as follows:—

First, and alone, by unanimous agreement, went the gallant British officer, bearing the life-taking instrument. At a respectful distance from him followed a human

mass, composed of twelve ladies grouped about a thirteenth—to wit, the twelve colleagues of *Gendarme*, who had decided at the last moment that every one of them that day would do her duty, and escort the heroine, at the risk, the awful risk, of the affair reaching the ears of Madame Morel, now happily wrapped in slumber. Had the said ladies had eyes for any one but themselves and the captain striding before them, they might have seen, at no great distance behind them, a couple, Franz Bürger and Margaret Winkelried.

“Come, Margaret, tell me, where are you taking me?” said Franz, for something like the tenth time since they had started. And Margaret, for something like the tenth time, pointed beyond, while she answered in the one word which formed the “strange device” on the banner of Longfellow’s youth.

At last their destination was reached by all. At last the duellists stood face to face. The meeting from a spectacular point of view was striking. Perhaps it lacked dramatic movement. Monsieur la Mie and Mademoiselle Robin (the latter in a tall hat and gentleman’s coat, beneath which latter trailed a skirt) stood as though riveted each to his place; the Professor was flanked by Ned Piggott, Mademoiselle Robin by Captain Macnab; while the rest of the party formed into a picturesque group—noticeable, even in their capacity of supernumeraries, being the pretty Orientalist, who, with a somewhat sleepy expression and a general air, if possible, rather more limp than usual, was sitting on a tree-stump; the brunette called Mina, pretty as the Orientalist, and with just enough European starch to enhance her beauty; Mademoiselle Robert (owner of the sharp voice) looking, good lady, to say the truth, rather like a personification

of thought-of-the-morrow—this the result of her attentions being divided between the scene present and the not-impossible scene to come, should any one wake and call a certain person early; Marie Minard, a smile broadening on her face, as smiles on some faces do broaden, like circles in water; Miss Scollop, famished, after the manner of Albion's daughters, and ravenously consuming biscuits; whilst not far from her, and imposing not by individuality, but by massiveness of arrangement, behold the nondescript young woman and remaining six ladies in a lump. A pleasing foil to them was afforded by a young man, who had at his side, I regret to say, a young maiden—not that there is not a certain charm in such juxtaposition in a general way, but, having mentioned the presence of thirteen ladies already, one fears that the captious arithmetical reader may exclaim—

“That makes a fourteenth, and only three gentlemen!”

Which is, alas! too true.

One half-minute had elapsed, and Monsieur la Mie and *Gendarme* still stood facing one another, the former with a look of stupefaction, the latter with a look of desperation. Still neither spoke nor moved; still the supernumeraries formed a motionless, silent group. It may be ridiculous, but I like to think that this silence and immovability might have lasted for all time, and the group as it had been depicted have become a fixture to this part of the Alps—a phenomenon to have been mentioned henceforth in all guide-books among sights worth seeing, had not Captain Macnab, just when the silence was at its height, fired his pistol into a neighbouring ravine.

CHAPTER LIV.

A BREAKFAST "AL FRESCO."

IF there could be said to be any degrees of absurdity in a scene so completely ludicrous as that which ensued on the captain's breaking the spell which had held speechless and motionless the party described in last chapter, these degrees were perhaps best exemplified in the effect of the shock on Miss Scollop, on the Orientalist, and—this oddly enough—on the group, the centre of which was formed by the nondescript young woman.

Miss Scollop, letting her bag of biscuits drop, threw up her arms and declared she was dying, in her customary eccentric French, "*Je me mours; ceurtainemong; je me mours!*" Whereat the Orientalist, who had *not* swooned away, as any one might have expected so limp a young person to do, developed the most unexpected eloquence, and, seizing hold of the Englishwoman, set herself to the arduous task of explaining to that personage that, the pistol having been fired into an opposite abyss, there was really no reason to imagine that the bullet had lodged in her.

Meanwhile the group composed of seven young women had given, I was going to say, one multyped bound, but that might mislead the reader. What they did was briefly this: literally lifted off their feet for a moment, four of them with a leap, three of them with a rush, and all of them with a scream, precipitated themselves between the Professor and *Gendarme*.

At this moment the quietest voice in the world—of all others, the voice of Monsieur Louis Auguier—said, as that little flat man, with a little flat napkin over his little flat arm, presented himself before the company.

“The breakfast is ready, ladies and gentlemen. This way, if you please.”

And with one hand he pointed to the wood which was skirted by the path where this famous duel was to have taken place.

* * * * *

“And pray, whose idea was this?” asked Marie Minard, as, taking the captain’s proffered arm, she followed mine host through the trees to a spot where, sure enough, “the breakfast was ready.”

“This idea, or, perhaps I may say, this inspiration,” replied the modest military gentleman, “was mine. It has been, I see, excellently carried out by our inimitable host” (Monsieur Louis Auguier bowed with exceeding grace, whilst yet disclaiming credit with the familiar wave of the hand). “May I,” continued the ex-commander of of men, stopping in front of an array of coffee-pots—“may I, mademoiselle, ask you to take the head of the—table-cloth?”

Marie Minard laughed that merry laugh of hers that once heard you never forgot, and, seating herself on the grass, took up a coffee-pot.

“An inspiration?” she said. “Yes, that it is. Sit down, good people”—this to the rest of the company rather unceremoniously, result of elation at being asked to preside at this very informal meal. “Why, where’s the captain now? I wanted him to help me.”

“Nay, even the most inspired of men, mademoiselle,” came the reply from the other end of the table, “cannot

breakfast off a cold chop. Monsieur Louis Auguier, who rightly deems that the children of Albion can under no circumstances breakfast on coffee and bread alone, has, with his customary skill, found ways and means of providing for Miss Scollop and me hot cutlets. Forgive the weakness of mortals not altogether sublime, and, permitting us to partake of these toothsome morsels whilst hot, let Monsieur la Mie in my stead aid you."

In the course of this speech, delivered in the most solemn voice, the eyes of the captain, behind whom stood Monsieur Louis Auguier, had twinkled with unutterable wickedness, especially during the part thereof containing an allusion to mine host—an allusion at which that personage had bowed, and, with an expression of excruciating politeness, murmured thanks of the pray-don't-mention-it type. It needed a supreme effort on the part of Marie Minard not to laugh out; and, feeling that she must have somebody's help and sympathy, she was fain to turn to Monsieur la Mie, who stood behind her. To him she handed a cup, as she said, relieved to be able to speak with her face turned away from the company—

"It's really too great a shame. Please take this coffee to Miss Scollop, and"—smiling despite herself—"tell that absurd Englishman that he is an ogre, and I shall have my revenge on him. Now, please, don't *you* smile," as Monsieur la Mie's face showed symptoms of amusement. "It's altogether too hard on me, seated here right in front of the poor little man."

"I will look as solemn as a mummy, if it please you," said the Professor; and was about to add further asseverations, when Marie interrupted him in a somewhat matter-of-fact style with—

"Take care!" you're upsetting that! Make haste

with it to Miss Scollop;" and he proceeded on his way, feeling temporarily snubbed, but none the less resolved to return to the charge.

Throughout breakfast he waited on Marie, and throughout breakfast the captain, meanly availing himself of his vantage-point, made jocose remarks, in which pomp of diction was curiously combined with the most solemn delivery. Add the greatest manifest relish on the part of himself of what he deemed his own wit—a relish in no small manner reflected on the faces of his two neighbours, Miss Scollop and Mademoiselle Robert, whose laughing old eyes were a sight to see. Marie tried to look stony, but failed signally; vowed vengeance, and felt she was certain never to wreak it. All this time Monsieur la Mie had been her assiduous "help;" they had talked a good deal, and the girl somehow felt that she had enjoyed the talking. Just now the Professor sat beside Franz Bürger. What were they talking about, and why were they laughing?—laughing, nay, they were shouting.

"I fear I have no more coffee," said Marie, as she became aware of an empty cup being held out to her, and tried pot after pot. "We seem to have despatched everything on the table, so I may as well, I suppose, give the signal to rise;" and she looked at Captain Macnab, then leaped to her feet. The captain followed suit; not that he leaped to his feet—on the contrary, he rose in that manner which proves that the dignity that comes with years has its main source in some lack of pliability in the joints. Then the party set out "home."

It would be interesting to know did any party of human beings, not military, ever set out on a march without falling to straggling within five minutes of start-

ing; and also to learn if the furthest behind were not always the sturdiest. While Captain Macnab, who was certainly past his prime, and Mesdames Robert and Scollop, who, excellent souls though they were, rather took umbrage at the mention of birthdays—while they briskly set out on their way to Les Plans, carrying along with them Ned Piggott, *Gendarme*, the Orientalist, Mina, and the seven commonplace young women, it was curious to see how that stalwart young man, Franz Bürger, and his rosy-cheeked companion seemed scarcely able to move one foot before the other; and still more curious to notice how the Professor and Marie Minard, having unaccountably got together at starting, fell behind not only the main group, but even behind Franz Bürger and Margaret. This, indeed, seems so altogether inexplicable, viewed in any but the light of psychical research, that one would feel irresistibly tempted to throw upon it some of that light, were it not that explanation is needed of another circumstance, which riveted the attention of Captain Macnab on his nimble downhill journey, and was, in its way, even still more extraordinary.

CHAPTER LV.

EXODUS OF THE CHILDREN.—“POOR CAPTAIN MACNAB!”

ONE thinks of the children's crusade; at least, the author does. The reader who has not the gift of pre-science perhaps thinks of nothing as yet.

The sight which met the astonished gaze of Captain Macnab was this:

Auguier, *l'autre*, with his inseparable milking-stool, with the national oblong basket slung over his shoulders, and an alpenstock in his hand, issuing from the Rose des Alpes, and joined at the gate of that establishment by some dozen other urchins—half of them, like him, with milking-stools, all of them, like him, with oblong baskets and alpenstocks. They make for the heart of the village—the Rose des Alpes, like the Edelweiss, being aristocratically situate on its outskirts. On their way they are joined by an ever-increasing number of urchins, milking-stools abounding, oblong baskets being the rule. Every boy in the village between the ages of eight and fourteen seems to join the army; boys beneath the age of eight being apparently rejected with scorn, youths above the age of fourteen being firmly but politely sent their ways. Auguier, *l'autre*, it is evident, presides. At the head of an ever-increasing host of children he walks. They have left the village behind them, and ascend the opposite mountain-range. They gather recruits as they go. Every now and then some misguided imp—nearer the age of

eight than fourteen, let us hope, for the dignity of mankind—dropping his alpenstock, gives vent to his feelings by trying to carry out some acrobatic feat, the injudiciousness, nay, the folly of attempting which, with a milking-stool and basket strapped to his person, he might have learnt during even a sojourn of eight years in this sorry world. At such times, Auguier, *l'autre*, turns round, and indications tend to prove that he withers with a gaze the atom of humanity already sinking beneath the ignominy following upon failure. On the whole, however, the juvenile army marches onward with a steady, orderly movement worthy of Prussians, and—case unique in the annals of history—behold, some hour later, a village in which there is not an urchin between the years of eight and fourteen. Smaller and smaller the children grow, and finally vanish into so many specks in the distance. Meanwhile the captain has held his hand horizontally over his eyes, in which act he is imitated by Miss Scollop, Mademoiselle Robert, *Gendarme*, the Orientalist, Mina, the seven commonplace young women, and Mr. Piggott. Poor Captain Macnab! His commonly cheery, genial face wears a look of unutterable dismay. The words which accompany this look are said in a low, hoarse voice which endows them with infinite pathos, despite a certain homeliness in themselves. They are as follows:—

“Oh, Lympy, now I’m in for it!”

CHAPTER LVI.

RETURN OF THE CHILDREN.—“BONSOIR, MONSIEUR LE
CAPITAINE!”

IN introducing the captain to the reader some time ago, I was careful to say that, like the familiar boys and girls of the tales of our youth, whilst possessing various charms, he had “one grave fault”—a passion for bargaining, which led him to buy up wholesale anything, everything, “going at a reduction,” to the total disregard of his sister’s feelings; acting, as he declared himself to be, on a principle of economy. The principle was one, it should be added, that would have made Adam Smith shudder. I gave full details of the lamentable affair with the legs of mutton. On that occasion, Captain Macnab had seen beforehand what he was to receive for his money, yet the reader remembers how great was the wrath of Olympia. On the present occasion, he had had the unhappy inspiration to make himself liable to buy up, unseen, flowers which, however great the reduction at which they might be sold, would be totally useless to him and Olympia, whilst demanding the outlay of an exorbitant sum. In other words, he had had the infelicitous notion to empower Auguier junior, as proposed in jest by Miss Peachum, to assemble as many of his pals as he could, and with them set out on an Edelweiss-picking expedition, he binding himself to purchase from them whatever they brought home. Alas! who would

have thought that the words "any number of pals, my boy," would result in "my boy" trotting out of the village at the head of an army? To show how the thing had come about. The captain, shortly after the conversation between himself and Miss Peachum, had betaken himself in search of Auguier junior, whom he found at last standing in a disconsolate attitude in one of the many verandahs of the Edelweiss. The boy had, properly speaking, no right to be here, but experience of the effect of rain on the maternal temper had taught him to seek shelter at the opposite inn when the weather was bad. He had been gossiping with Babette when the captain had opened the door, and that maiden's short kilted skirt was just vanishing round a turn in the verandah when the Scotchman stepped out and saw it, just in time to admire duly the rapidity of the damsel and the abstracted, innocent air with which the urchin gazed at a rafter above him. Then he and the latter made the unfortunate contract concerning the flower.

Twenty centimes a spray had been asked of Captain Macnab at the shops; he was ready to give ten.

"Ten? That would only pay on a lot," the boy replied.

"Well, then, get me a lot."

"H'm! It's slow work getting Edelweiss. Might I take some pals with me?"

"Any number."

"And you'll buy up all we bring home?"

"Yes, all, *mon brave*. What are you thinking of?"

The boy with the grimy face and sunny eyes looked up in much perplexity. This wholesale order smacked of business.

"Monsieur le capitaine is a *négociant* as well as officer?" he said, with a note of interrogation in his voice.

"Nay, not exactly."

"Monsieur le capitaine" felt something very like a twinge at this, after all, not altogether unnatural construction put by the boy on his course of action. "Monsieur le capitaine" felt specially thankful that Olympia was indoors.

A shrill voice summoned Auguier junior away. He chuckled as he took his departure. "Any number," the Scotchman had said. Oho!

He took him at his word, and well might the Captain next day look dismayed. It was six o'clock when the juvenile host returned. Six sturdy Alpine boys with, slung to their shoulders, six oblong baskets full to overflowing with the furry flower, came up to the captain's room.

"Bonsoir, M'sieur le capitaine. Here we are."

"Oh, there you are! Along the walls, that's it. You can leave the baskets for the present. Any more of them?"

"Six more outside, Monsieur le capitaine" (speaker, Auguier, *l'autre*). "We went off, a troop of us, but packed all we got into twelve baskets before we came up to the house—more convenient, we thought."

"Quite so. Very convenient"—laconically. "Here come the others. We'll settle to-morrow, my lads. Thank you. Good evening."

"Good evening, monsieur." A chorus of cheery voices echo the words.

Poor Captain Macnab!

CHAPTER LVII.

THE PERFECT BROTHER.

EVERY one knows what makes the perfect lover; a good many people know what makes the perfect father, the perfect husband; and a few of us know what makes the perfect cousin, the perfect friend; but the being, if such there be, who would wish to illustrate in his person the perfect brother seems destined to meet with failure, there being positively no laws on the subject, which is the more unaccountable that the plainest of directions exist for the benefit of the would-be perfect sister—nay, have existed for so long, and found such wide application, that the world at the present moment is, as every one knows, overflowing with sisters of this kind.

To return to Captain Macnab. If any man could be said to have ever attempted to give a passing illustration of that which something vaguely tells us the perfect brother might be, I think it may be said that man was he on the day here under discussion, that day scored black in his almanac from the moment in which he caught sight of the outgoing army of boys, and realized that to legion had swelled "any number of pals." The captain, be it emphatically said, was polite to all ladies, and made no exception in the case of Olympia; on the other hand—be this said in a whisper—the captain took honest pleasure in the society of all ladies, save and excepting Olympia. Not only did he take no pleasure, and make

no pretence of taking any pleasure in her society, but he shamelessly by the hour together left her to her own devices. This pained Olympia—"pained her much," as she declared. Howbeit, she was wont to add, she had become used to her brother's negligence, having suffered it for days, and weeks, and months—she might have said, for years; but Olympia never mentioned years, and it equally "pained her much" when persons—as some persons will, and did—reminded her of the tendency of days and weeks and months to run to years. The greater was the pleasurable surprise which she felt when suddenly confronted on this auspicious day with what seemed to be an embodiment of the perfect brother, such as she had hitherto but seen when wrapped in maiden meditation. Most delicious was it to meet with this embodiment in the person of her own Walter—that always normally polite, but heretofore, as far as she was concerned, seldom abnormally solicitous, and never abnormally tender, individual. Not only did he in the whole course of the day hardly quit her side, but his manner was almost lover-like. He had proposed that they should go on a sketching-ramble together. "What! this another of your paintings, Lympy?" he had said, gingerly taking up the latest monstrosity. "You'll soon beat Nature herself, old girl. This—this"—he meant to say "this lake," but in time remembered the danger of particularizing—"this landscape here is out and out the best thing you've produced." He had insisted on running on all kinds of errands for her, had expressed the greatest alarm on her exposing herself to a draught, had offered to read aloud to her, had looked out for tit-bits for her at the midday meal—in a word, had shown that ecstatic good-humour

and officious alacrity which, whilst peculiarly characteristic of the "good boy," are traits too rarely seen in the human subject after the attainment of what he calls his years of discretion.

As the day wore on, and the surprise at this sudden delightful transformation in her brother was beginning to yield to inexpressible pleasure thereat, it was broken to Olympia by Miss Peachum that a double marriage had been announced as about to take place at Les Plans, one of the bridegrooms being Monsieur la Mie, one of the brides his sister Nicolette.

CHAPTER LVIII.

EXTRAORDINARY CONDUCT OF MISS MACNAB.—"MY GRACIOUS, WALTER, YOU MAKE ME QUITE UNCOMFORTABLE!"

A DOUBLE marriage—one of the bridegrooms Monsieur la Mie.

This, then, was the meaning of the change in Walter. The colour rose to poor Olympia's neck and face, and to the tip of her nose, as she told herself that she had been a fool, and that Walter knew it. In what words could she ask of him to be his old bluff self, rather than this unnatural, different being, reminding her at every instant, by his solicitude and strange new manner, of folly the memory of which was so humiliating?

Scarcely had the noisy steps of Auguier junior and his friends died out of the captain's hearing, before he heard a well-known tread, slow and stately, in the passage.

It was followed by a tap at his door, which caused him, soldier though he was, to catch his breath as he gasped feebly—

“C-ome in!”

Olympia stood in the doorway. Her brother, who had risen, overcome at sight of her, dropped back into his chair, with one of those really tragic gestures, a sort of grasping at something in empty air, which it is patently foolish to think of, as some people do, as in their right place only on the stage. As soon as he had in a measure recovered composure, he looked at the baskets. They had been arranged with a view, apparently, to symmetry, three along each wall, so that in whatever direction the eye turned, it was met by the sight of piled-up Edelweiss. From the baskets he looked at Olympia; and she, following his example, looked from the baskets to him, and from him to the baskets, the four triplets garnishing the walls. Then she smiled. Now, this was to the captain the most unexpected, weird, unearthly form her conduct could have taken. He groaned. Had she forthwith begun to frisk about the room, with one hand holding up her skirt and with the other wreathing the Edelweiss in her locks, singing with vacant stare and hollow laugh, fragments of old English ballads, like a nineteenth-century, middle-aged Ophelia, the situation could have seemed no more mysterious and uncanny. He recalled scenes gone by, evoked by his indiscriminate purchases. A leading feature in all and each of these had been the eloquent indignation of Olympia, recapitulation of all that she had been to him, of all that she had denied herself for him, combined with the never-absent series of questions—Did he wish to break her heart?

Was she to understand that black ingratitude was the reward for lifelong self-effacement? Was she blind, or did she see? Was she raving mad? Was their name Macnab? Was he her brother?

Accustomed as the captain had been to this upon occasions on none of which he had been guilty of the supreme folly and extravagance shown in this present act, it was with a feeling of more than fear, it was with shuddering dismay, that he now beheld his sister, personification to him of Thrift, still look alternately at him and at the baskets, while she blandly, placidly smiled.

"So this—this is why you have been so specially thoughtful to me all day, Walter?"

There was a far-off, sepulchral tone in her voice; but it was not one of anger, nor even of reproach, and she still smiled.

"My dear Olympia, I really never thought I should be let in for all this. What to do with it I—I know as little as you. Of course, I get it at a great reduction; but—— For heaven's sake, Olympia, stop that gruesome smile! I knew you'd be put out, but I never bargained for this"—looking at her with growing concern, as she slowly spun round and viewed the wicker-baskets with an expression of vacant pleasure. "If you knew what I've gone through, thinking of this confounded plant, and what would be——"

"Stay a minute." Olympia interrupted him, and pointed to the baskets. "Is that all?"

Well, a murderer who had given himself up to justice, and, on confessing his crime, had met with a benignant "Oh, that trifle!" could hardly have looked more bewildered than the captain, as his economical, elderly,

screwy, and shrewy sister, far from awakening to a sense of the magnitude of his recklessness, in face of the twelve loads of Edelweiss, at which he himself could only stare aghast, marvelling what, at any reduction, they would cost, and what, cost what they might, he ever could do with them—as Olympia, with that smile at one side of her lip, the Macnab smile, said these words, “Is that all?” with, moreover, a toss of her head which caused two hair-pins to loosen, whilst a plait which they had fastened relaxed with them; and, with them, next minute illustrated the downward bent to which even the poet’s arrow “shot into the air” falls a victim.

With consummate delicacy, the captain pretended to be, as regarded this circumstance, of those who have eyes and see not.

“All? Why, look here, Olympia, you don’t seriously imagine that I’ve got another dozen of—of this kind of thing stowed away in my wardrobe. I do seem, I’ll admit, to have surpassed even myself; but, hang it! you too are coming it rather strong just now, and in a new line. Yes, I’d rather, upon my word, that you’d have it out with me as usual, than take on in this way. Any man may make a fool of himself once too often. I’ve done so, and—here, my hand on it—I never will make another wholesale purchase.”

Olympia ceased to smile. It dawned on her that her brother was indeed wrapped up in his own doings, and, needless to say, her delight thereat was boundless.

“Come,” she exclaimed, a bright thought striking her, “enough of all this, Walter. I—I accept your promise. For the rest, what’s done can’t be undone, can it?” (This truest of all philosophies Captain Macnab

hears for the first time from the lips of Olympia, and nods.) "I suppose we have most of us been, h'm—foolish in our day, haven't we? (Another admission amazing from Miss Macnab, and again a nod from the captain). "For once, you admit that you yourself don't know what to do with your purchase. Make it over to me,—You will? Thank you. My gracious, Walter, what a demonstration! You make me quite uncomfortable."

This as "Walter," his feelings becoming too much for him, gives her a sounding kiss.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE WEDDING.—THE WEDDING-BREAKFAST.—"I'M GLAD I'M MARRIED."

LES PLANS is the smallest of very small places. Its post-office is a shed, and its church is another. The letters at the post-office, when most numerous, reach the number of one hundred; the congregation at the church in the height of the season reaches, perhaps, the number of one hundred and one—for Les Plans, small spot though it be, has, like other spots, large and small, its "season."

What Les Plans has not—this a thing at which one cannot sufficiently wonder—is a newspaper. That any speck in the globe having two inns, a post-office, and church, receiving at times, and (doubtless) at times transmitting letters to the number of one hundred a day, should have in its length and breadth no one foolish enough to start—at least, during "the season"—a news-

paper devoted to its doings and sayings, is a phenomenon so altogether refreshing, that the mere mention of it seems to smack of advertisement of the place. Yet the mention of it here is not meant to lure visitors to pierce beyond Bex, to risk a drive in the carriage of the bearded Meunier, but merely to show that the following has not seen the light of publication before. It was written some ten days after the events recorded in last chapter, by one of the thirteen ladies forming the staff of Madame Morel; and she has in it, here and there, it appears to me, felicitously caught the tone peculiar to the paragraphs which adorn the wedding department of some of our fashion-papers.

“A pleasing break in the somewhat monotonous quiet of our calm retreat was afforded yesterday by the solemnization of a triple wedding in our small and primitive church. The officiating clergyman was Monsieur le pasteur Rondeau, the much-esteemed local preacher. The couples were—

“Couple number one: Professor François La Mie, the well-known savant and poet, and Mademoiselle Minard. Couple number two: Mr. Edward Piggot and Mademoiselle la Mie. Couple number three: Herr Franz Bürger and Fräulein Winkelried.

“The brides were dressed *en suite* in white Swiss muslin. The dresses of all three were looped with Edelweiss; each wore a wreath of Edelweiss, and carried Edelweiss in her hand. The passage from the church door to the altar was strewn with Edelweiss. It was further noticed that every lady in the congregation bore

a nosegay of Edelweiss, and that every gentleman present wore Edelweiss in his button-hole. The effect of this was unique and charming. The idea is attributed to an English lady-visitor to Les Plans, Miss Olympia Macnab, whose gift the flowers are said to have been.

"The brides, with the exception of Mademoiselle la Mie, were attended by their fathers, who had arrived the day before. Mademoiselle la Mie was attended by Captain Macnab. The only other gentlemen present known to the writer of this article were Messrs. John, Juan, and Mervyn Luscombe-Binns, the last-named widely known as 'the Cherub.' Ladies were in a majority.

"The ceremony passed off, on the whole, satisfactorily, the principal gentlemen looking less agonized than is usual under these painful circumstances, the principal ladies showing commendable fortitude. A passing commotion was caused by loud sobs in the audience as Professor la Mie was confided henceforth and for ever to the charge of Mademoiselle Minard; gnashing of teeth and rending of garments being words that but feebly describe the heartrending grief testified in a row of seats occupied by twelve learned spinsters, said to compose the teaching staff of a well-known academy in Geneva. Furthermore, as the Professor and his newly espoused left the altar, a young English lady, Miss Ottilie Luscombe-Binns, started up, and, after uttering some incoherent words, fell back in her seat with a Bernhardtesque stare and general stiffening of the body. Not until two pins had been simultaneously applied, as apparently preconcerted, by 'the Cherub' and his sister, did she recover animation, when, sitting up, she bestowed on all around, but especially on the officiating priest, a misty smile.

"After the service, the entire congregation, including several rustics, was invited to partake of an open-air breakfast in the grounds of the Edelweiss and Rose des Alpes, the two excellent local inns, the gates having been taken down, and the grounds of both establishments united by a covered passage, at the request of the three couples, for the occasion. The hostesses——"

Here the writing becomes illegible, so that no choice remains but for me to continue the narrative. To proceed with the breakfast. It was served in the garden at several small tables, Monsieur Louis Auguier presiding over the waiting department in that quiet yet eminently imposing style so peculiarly his own. Without wishing to cast aspersion on the skill which Germans are universally acknowledged to show in the art of carrying a number of chairs in one hand and a tray with some dozen tumblers, plus bottles, in the other—whilst in no wise denying that to the sons of the fatherland, numerically speaking, must, by all impartial travellers, be granted the proud distinction of having brought waiting as an art to its highest perfection, I will, nevertheless, venture to say that, just as indeed among his own compatriots Monsieur Louis Auguier stood alone, so also I believe, not only would we have borne comparison with the most perfect of German waiters, but that beside him the latter prodigy, to any one but one blinded by prejudice, would have seemed nothing out of the common. In the balancing of chairs and glass-laden trays the two might have been equal, though history records no instance of a German waiter's achieving the feats in this direction that have

been seen carried out by Monsieur Louis Auguier; in the matter of tip-toeing the former might not have lost by the comparison, though one rather fancies he would; but where it were safe to draw the line is at the smile—that subdued yet all-embracing smile of Monsieur Louis Auguier's, in the same breath with which one would no more mention the vapid smirk worn by most waiters, than one would mention a wedding-cake in the same breath with Mont Blanc, or a tub of blue water in the same moment with Lake Lemman.

In his duty of chief waiter on the guests, Monsieur Louis Auguier was assisted (it cannot truthfully be said “ably”) by a young man lately promoted to the position of clerk at the post office, our old friend the German cottager, dressed for the nonce in swallow-tails; by his younger brother, the name of whom has never transpired, —also arrayed in swallow-tails; and by the damsel called Babette, in a new frock, a new apron, and—a great part of the time—in blushes. That Monsieur Louis Auguier was inefficiently aided by this trio was, be it said at once, owing to no lack of zeal on the part of any one of its members. On the contrary, no sooner had mine host sent the post-office clerk off on some errand, than Babette went winging after him, or *vice versâ*, with all the good will in the world; whereat the nameless younger Auguier, guiltless, he vowed, of any conspiracy in the matter, with difficulty for the moment restraining his mirth, would beg to be given something to do, and then, having set off with all seeming readiness to wait upon some one, would, in the midst of so doing, overcome by the comic emotion, set down tray and glasses, and, holding his sides, wake echo with shouts of laughter. The effort of this on Cap-

tain Macnab the first time it happened was all but fatal. Fancy yourself a stout, elderly gentleman, with a very marked sense of the ludicrous, confronted suddenly by a small boy, whose figure in peasant dress had always struck you as laughable enough, and who, hitherto pleasantly grimy, like a true son of the soil, now crops up before you, *clean*—dismally, horribly clean, with the air of saying, like a walking soap-advertisement, “I have found it excellent for the face and hands.” His rustic garb, moreover, has made way for—of all things in the world—swallow-tails; and this imp, this goblin, this little black-robed phantom, more than ever consumed with merriment that he sees the effect produced by his own preposterous appearance, laughs, not normally, so many peals, and it’s over, but inordinately and with no sign of abatement, every peal louder than the last.

“Come now what may, I think I can live it down,” said the captain, on recovering his senses, after what had seemed temporary derangement on first catching sight of the urchin.

In this pleasant conviction we will leave him, and look out for other familiar faces. With a few exceptions, all with whom the reader has become acquainted in the course of this narrative were present at the wedding-breakfast, and, with a few exceptions, all acquitted themselves admirably. Madame la Mie and Madame Minard sat side by side, and though they by no means so suddenly exchanged rapturous demonstrations of friendship as did Messrs. Capulet and Montague on their laying aside, rather late, it is true, “ancient grudge,” they were fairly polite; and in this way formed a pleasing companion-picture to that presented by Mesdames Metzle and

Auguier, who vied in yielding to each other the place of honour, with a laboured courtesy which, though full of a fearsome suggestiveness, was none the less, as long as it lasted, beautiful to behold.

Madame Morel, meanwhile, more like the queen-bee than ever, fluttered in and out among her twelve subordinates, every now and then rushing to embrace "cette bonne chère Marie." The said subordinates were apparently learning to accept the situation, Mademoiselle Robert and Miss Scollop being, curiously enough, the longest to inveigh. These two elderly maidens declared that any man making up his mind to tear from the state of single blessedness one of thirteen happy spinsters, as Monsieur la Mie had done, might in common kindness have selected for that purpose, not the young and hopeful, but the elderly and resigned.

"No, I can't take that view of the matter," said *Gen-darme*, with a look in the direction of the "young and hopeful" martyr to the Professor's wiles; "I can't go that far"—carrying a large piece of cake to her lips. "What strikes me is this: the heavy style is a mistake. I see it more and more; I fail to please, and my hopes meet with blight. Thank you," as one of her colleagues, in a somewhat tactless manner, seeing that the above-mentioned piece of cake had gone the way of all edibles during this harangue, seized the opportunity of a pause in this flow of eloquence to pass a cake-basket—"thank you. As I was saying, my hopes meet with blight. You mean well, my friend"—this to the lady in question, who still presented the basket, with an insinuating smile, slowly turning it round, as though to display the variety of the confections contained in it—"you mean well, my good soul,

but you lack the fine intuition which should show you that, though I unconsciously may have demolished one slice of cake during what I have just been saying, my feelings are getting more and more the better of me, and I should infallibly choke did I attempt to continue in this strain, and eat the while; and yet—no, I cannot resist that masterpiece in pink and white,” gingerly taking up a puffy cake combining the said colours, and pushing the basket towards two laughing brunettes, the Orientalist and Mina.

“I sometimes wonder,” says the former, in her lazy drawl, while she coolly contemplates the basket with a view to deciding at her leisure which of the many confections therein contained is most worthy of expending on it the trouble of munching—“I sometimes wonder how *Gendarme* finds time to read the amount of second-rate fiction, which she must, to be able to rhapsodize as she does. Ah, you monster! are you omnivorous?”

Gendarme had listened to her colleague’s pensive remark with a smile increasing visibly as she followed the gaze of that lazy individual roving over the cakes. Seeing it finally rest with evident satisfaction on one specially tempting one, she took vengeance on her mocking friend by calmly abstracting the same, and disposing thereof as she had before disposed of the masterpiece in white and pink, to the no small amusement of every one. So much, alas, for twelve blue-stockings!

At a neighbouring table sat the families Luscombe-Binns and Peachum. Metaphorically speaking, a cloud hung over this table, the result partially of its having been necessary to remove from it within five minutes of sitting down the three children, who had conceived the unhappy

idea that it would be a good bit of fun to test who could eat the most and the quickest, and, availing themselves of the general animation, had cleared unseen a goodly number of plates, when suddenly and with curious simultaneity they were seized with violent internal pains, this causing them to rend the air with screams. The work of speedy removal had been undertaken by Mrs. Luscombe-Binns, Mrs. Peachum, and Miss Peachum. As the sight of the six kicking legs, ditto punching arms, grew less in the distance, Miss Luscombe-Binns (Ottile) turned to her brother. That youth, on whom several gazes were bent, had fixed his full blue eye on the aërial region which surrounds this grosser earth.

"Don't be a goose, Juan," said Ottie amiably; then, in a tone equally pleasing, added, speaking across the table, "And you, father? What do you want?"

In partial extenuation of Ottie's manner, it must be said that the gentlemen of her family would certainly have aggravated a saint, in their passive absurdity; whereas, in her highest flights of self-glorification, Ottie would not have likened herself to any of the large body of canonized men and women. Her father for a full minute past had sat pointing his right-hand forefinger straight before him; and, as before him were a number of objects, it was, humanly speaking, impossible to know at what particular one he was pointing. The fact was as follows. This unhappy, hen-pecked man had resolved to profit by the temporary absence of his wife to enjoy in quiet a ham-sandwich. Now, to the foreign palate a ham-sandwich recommends itself without mustard; not so to the British. Having taken a mouthful of one, Mr. Binns decided that have mustard with it he must. At the same moment he

saw right in front of him, within reach of his daughter Ottie, a cruet-stand containing, among other seasonings, a dull, brownish fluid, which, as Englishmen on the Continent very soon learn, is the substitute abroad for Colman's, and which really has, when you come to think of it, a very faint taste of mouldy, sour, stale mustard.

Mr. Binns had meant to ask his daughter to pass him this cruet; had tried again and again to say, "Will you pass me that mustard?" To any one not acquainted with the peculiar nature of the malady with which he was afflicted, and to which science has given the pretty name of amnesia, it will seem that to say, "Will you give me that mustard?" was a simple thing indeed.

Mr. Binns could not say it. He found he could ask for everything under the sun but—that mustard. That plate, that spoon, that hat, that umbrella, that alpenstock—these were words that ran glibly off his tongue; these were things he could and did ask for, miserably aware that what he wanted was none of them, but—that mustard. It was only when quite convinced of the hopelessness attached to his attempts to do so, that he had subsided into the attitude of mute appeal that had so aggravated his daughter, pointing with his right hand forefinger straight in front of him.

"Yes, you father! What do you want?" she repeated, with if possible an increase of asperity, asking herself, as, truth to say, she almost might, were it not better not to be, than know one's-self the daughter, the sister, of creatures like these?

Happily (some may think *unhappily*), Mesdames Luscombe-Binns and Peachum at this moment returned. Juan resumed his study of invisible astral bodies, while

Ottie fixed her attention on her own plate. Here be it said that Miss Luscombe-Binns was so near-sighted as to give her, when eating, the appearance of browsing. The paternal Binns, meanwhile (and for him one cannot help feeling compassion), in sheer trepidation, the result of the sudden reappearance of his better three-quarters, dropped at one and the same time his sandwich and the really wildly absurd hope which he had for a moment cherished of enjoying it.

He took up the nearest plate containing refreshments, and passed it to his wife. She looked at it, then at his plate and the luckless sandwich on it.

"Thank you, Mr. Binns; *I* am not all-devouring. It is not from *me*, Mr. Binns, that the children have inherited their greediness; not through any example of *mine* that we have just had so disgraceful an exhibition. You may put that down, Mr. Binns."

Mr. Binns did put "that down," and if ever a man felt himself "put down," that man at this instant was he. The emphasis on the first person in the foregoing harangue had been painfully marked; equally marked had been the way in which Mrs. Luscombe-Binns, in so speaking, had persistently looked at the commenced sandwich on his plate.

"Juan and Ottie!!!"—Mrs. Binns turned to her son and daughter—"if you have not learnt to pay common respect to your father, or have not enough rudimentary knowledge of Scripture to know the fifth commandment, leave the table!"

This somewhat startling conclusion to her oration was the result of her observing the eyes of Juan and Ottie fixed on their father at the close of her former speech

with unconcealed glee. It was a custom with Mrs. Binns, while she never spared her husband before her children, to demand from them strict deference to this parent.

The offending ones dropped their eyes; the same did Mrs. and Miss Peachum; the same did Mr. Binns. It was at this point that the cloud, mentioned above as hanging over this table, seemed to become densest.

Happily there were near at hand other, sunnier scenes. At only a few steps distance was Monsieur Meunier, the twinkling driver, invited at the special request of Margaret, who is now talking to him, the subject of their conversation being—of all others in the world — “my horse,” Ami, the peerless, priceless quadruped. Oh, the depths of wickedness that may lurk behind earnest eyes!

“Nay, do go on, Monsieur Meunier,” she is just saying. “Indeed I bear him no grudge. All has turned out so happily; and the throw, and the illness, why, they only helped to hasten matters. Besides, I have promised my—my husband, that he should hear from you all about your horse.”

And so she had. This Margaret, who sits leaning back in a garden-seat, propped quite unnecessarily, by an arm in a black encasing; this Margaret, lovely as when we saw her on Lake Lemman before Chillon, on that memorable occasion on which she had distracted Madame la Mie standing beside “mon fils” with her young face raised to his, and bathed in smiles and sunlight; this Margaret, who blushes and stumbles as she says, for the first time, “my—my husband,” in speaking of the gentleman whose arm, yes, quite unnecessarily, helps to prop her; this most ideal of German maidens, pretty, dreamy, and now absurdly happy, had arranged with said “hus-

band" within one hour of their union that, since he wanted full particulars concerning that throw, he had best obtain a full account of Ami, and that from Monsieur Meunier.

"There he is on a bench. Let us sit down beside him for a moment. It will be such fun; only one thing mind, Franz, you must look as serious as I shall. A smile would spoil it all."

This the prelude to the conversation with the bearded charioteer. Could treachery further go?

Long did the man of hair and twinkles, the imperturbably complacent Monsieur Meunier, expatiate on the merits and eccentricities of Ami; long did he take to argue out that the latter's throwing of mademoiselle (he begged her pardon, *madame*—this with an access of twinkling that would have startled any one but Margaret, accustomed to Jacques Meunier)—that Ami's throwing of "madame" on level ground was an act the like of which he had never, never before committed; and the like of which it would be patently foolish to imagine that he would ever again be capable of. In view, indeed, of the danger of such an opinion gaining ground, a thing which would seriously compromise him professionally, Monsieur Meunier tried his best to look serious, but failed, as was not unnatural from the nature of his eyes, over the mirthful propensities of which he had long lost control.

During the whole of this rather one-sided dialogue, Franz Bürger, despite a promise exacted and given, had ingloriously succumbed to laughter. Not that he laughed aloud—Margaret would never have forgiven that—but he shook with quiet mirth, and (Margaret was not mistaken)

the seat began to shake with him. What if Monsieur Meunier felt the motion, and, divining the cause, compared with it what had been her rapt and serious look throughout the conversation? He would, of course, conclude that she and Franz had been procuring themselves amusement at his expense, and then—— Poor Margaret gasped. A person, she told herself with that quickness which is peculiarly feminine (no man, excepting, perhaps, a Bacon, evolving in an hour half the philosophy that a woman does in a minute), a person may have a constant sparkle in his own eye, showing his keen enjoyment of your absurdity; but not even such a person will enjoy the twinkle in your eye, denoting your equally exquisite relish of his comicality. *Ergo* (a rather fine trait I deem that in a woman, that when evolving a theory, though it be but in the flash of a thought, she always does so with “ergo”)—ergo, though Monsieur Meunier, humorous soul that he was, might have hugely enjoyed such vibrations as, by laughing at Herr Franz Bürger, he himself might impart to the seat, it was plain that he would not enjoy the tremolo-motion imparted to it by the laughter of Herr Franz Bürger—at him.

Luckily Margaret's eye caught sight of the doctor, the little pompous M.D. who had attended her in her late illness. He bowed.

“Franz dear, I should like to introduce you to Dr. Tepit.”

“Would you, my—my wife?”

Franz, manlike, had been more delighted with nothing in the foregoing conversation than the bungling of his newly espoused over “my husband.” He tried, poor fellow, as he spoke, to catch Margaret's tone and blush

—as if ever man yet breathed who could catch a girl's tone and blush. Of course he failed ignominiously, and of course Margaret smiled contempt. Then she told him her mind about his perfidious conduct in the matter of laughter; taxed him with perjury within two hours of marriage. He posed as abject. He offered to kneel and apologize.

"Here? don't attempt it! And now be sensible. I want you to be your very nicest to Dr. Tepit, and when he asks how is 'our little foot?' don't laugh. He always speaks in the first person plural; it is his little way."

"Is it? I like the style of your gentlemen friends, I must say. They seem to be one more peculiar than the other. After Monsieur Meunier, Dr. Tepit. Well done, little woman!" And he advances towards the doctor in would-be Prussian style—purely would-be, for Franz Bürger is a Suabian, every inch of him, with all the sun and all the shadow of the south in his composition.

The little doctor rises, shakes hands effusively with him and "madame," and—curious, unexpected change—the "we" is dropped. Frau Bürger of two hours meets with a deference that Margaret Winkelried of twenty years had never known. She is no longer treated like an infant; her foot is spoken of, for the first time, as though it were not common property. The little medical gentleman talks, in fact, quite rationally, studiously addressing himself at intervals to Margaret in the course of a discourse, somewhat dry, but doubtless, on that very account, the more learned, on the anatomy of the foot, more especially those parts thereof subject to dislocation—a discourse which he emphasizes by frequent slow application of the back of the closed right hand to the

palm of the straightened left; that, as all the world knows, or ought to know, a gesture which lends peculiar weight to any argument.

Frau Bürger feels impressed, and yet not altogether pleased. What will you? This, to her, quite new phase in the doctor undeniably gives to her preceding description of him the lie.

"Rather prosy old gentleman," is Franz's very natural comment, as he quits the part of the garden occupied by the medical man, and wanders with his bride towards a clump of trees. "I must say, dear, I failed to observe anything specially comical about him."

Margaret does not answer him, but studies her wedding-ring with one of those smiles which steal from the lips to the eyes. Then she makes a statement which, I suppose, no man ever yet took amiss, a statement as follows:—

"All things put together, Franz, I'm glad I'm married."

CHAPTER LX.

THE END, PARTLY LINGUISTIC, PARTLY SENTIMENTAL.

"NAY, stop a minute; I want to know them every one."

The speaker is Mrs. Piggott, Swiss Mrs. Piggot, and beside her sits her English husband. As she speaks, she lays the forefinger of her right hand against the thumb of her left, a signal that she is prepared to do anything in the way of addition. What she wants to know is the various diminutives of her husband's Christian name. Since making acquaintance with such members of his family as have come to Les Plans to be present at his wedding, she has become aware that this young man answers to some half-dozen names. A Frenchwoman is essentially order-loving; Nicolette wishes to commit each of these names to a finger, and thence to memory.

"Suppose," she adds, "we take them in alphabetical order. Ned, group with Neddy, makes two"—dotting off thumb and forefinger of left hand. "Ted, group with Teddy, makes two again, makes four"—dotting off second and third finger. "What are you laughing at?"

"You've forgotten 'Eddy.'"

"Ah! so I have. How stupid of me! Ed, group with Eddy, makes——"

"'Ed?' There's no name 'Ed.'"

"Isn't there?"—facing round, not at all pleased at

this anomaly which brings her system of grouping by twos to a standstill. "And, pray, why not?"

"It belongs to the many mysteries of our language."

Poor Nicolette relapses into silence. As she sits beside Ned, let us steal a peep at her. She is not one half, nay, not one quarter, as lovely as Margaret. Her face is pretty—a little childlike; her colouring might be softer, her hair more silken; yet she is very pleasing—tall, slight, and with perfect hands and feet. She has what the French call "charm."

"Has your mother any whims, Edward?" she says, after a while, with a glance in the direction of a lady clothed rather strikingly *à l'Anglaise*—a buxom, elderly dame, in a very short dress of a very light material, and a very large speckled hat, to which is attached an ample gossamer veil gathered on a band and pendant all round. This lady has on one side of her two pretty daughters, looking each the other's *Doppelgänger*, both clad exactly alike, in ultra-æsthetic style; so much so, indeed, that, fresh from the joint studio of nature and art, they might be labelled "Studies in Nymphs." On the other side of the matron stands a splendid boy of twelve, with bare brown legs, who has just received a mild rebuke for anticipating events so far as to declare emphatically that "*he means to be called uncle.*"

"Has—has your mother any whims, Edward?" repeats Nicolette, still contemplating this group.

"More than I could enumerate, dearest. Why do you ask?"

"Because mine has so many. One thing I know—she will not at all approve of your having so many names. I know exactly what she will say: '*Diable*

emporte ces Anglais! Ned, Ted, et ainsi de suite. Voilà des bêtises!''''

So happily has the girl hit the impetuous manner, the tone, and look with which her mother would set off a tirade like this, and so exactly is this the tirade that would be likely to come from that lady, that it is all Mr. Piggott can do to keep serious. He looks back into the flushed face.

"How pretty she is, and how prettily she talks French!" he thinks. This, if you please, he considers a great accomplishment. Then, taking one of her hands in both of his, he adds—

"You dear little Frenchwoman! Do invoke that blessing on us once more—*Diable emporte ces Anglais.*"

So they chatter on, while the morning sun rises higher and higher.

And Monsieur la Mie and Marie, what of them? Are they too on some bench, chattering? No; they are walking down the garden. How tall they look! Her hand is on his arm. They are leaving the garden behind them; they have stepped into the road.

"Marie, my wife, see here."

He takes a book from his pocket, and gives it her.

Is it——? Why, yes, of course it is—that curious note-book!

"What do you mean, François? What do you want me to do with this? To read it?"

"Certainly, if you like. Chiefly, I want you to throw it into that torrent. I have just discovered, my darling, that life is not quite a comedy, and love not quite a farce, I——"

She is not listening to him. She has half opened the book. "Ungenerous!" says a voice—not his—and she closes it, and flings it into the torrent.

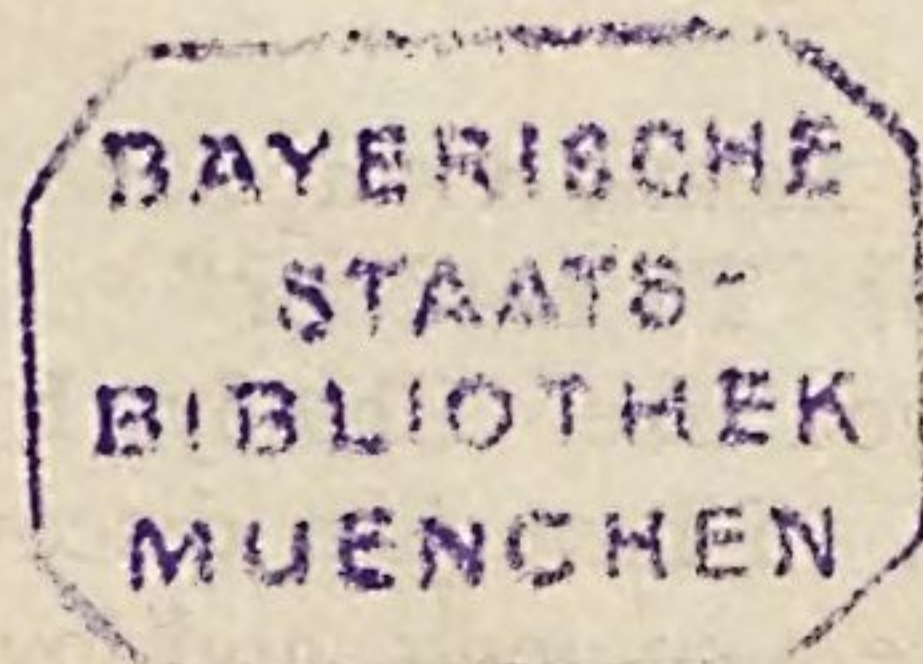
"Marie! My own! my wife!"

This time the voice is his.

Reader, I know it; you are laughing in your sleeve. You are thinking of Monsieur La Mie's pet phrase, *Joli ça!*

Down the road the couple wander. Neither speaks, because (you may laugh outright, dear reader, but I would stake my kingdom on the statement) both are revolving *belles pensées*, and—thoughts do escape one's memory so, that if you understand him, Monsieur la Mie is just a little sorry that he did not keep a leaflet of that notebook, *and the stump of pencil*.

THE END.



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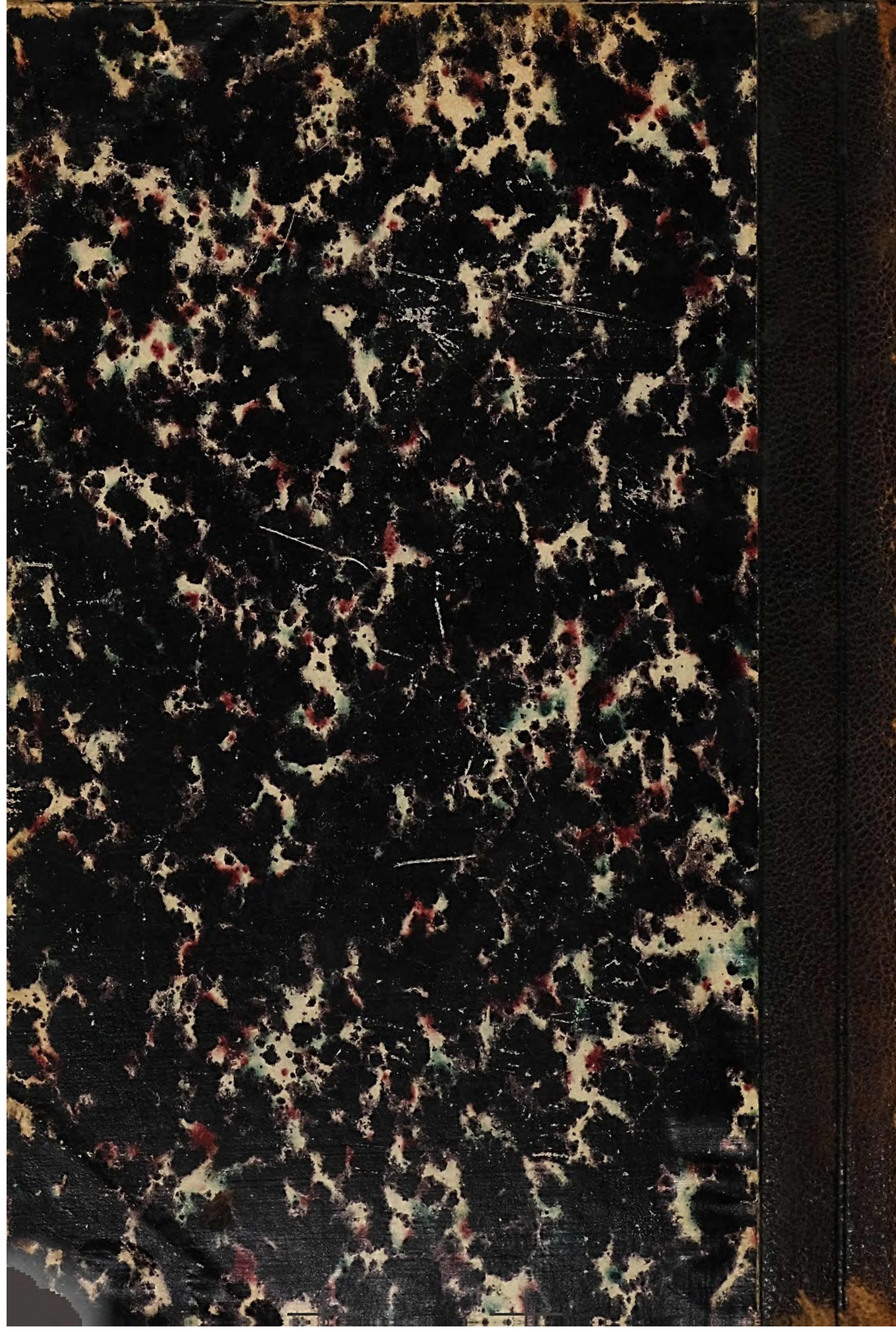
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